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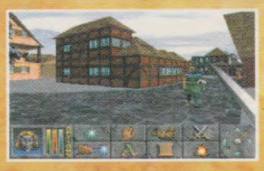

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the gaming magazine arcane

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JANUARY 1997
ISSUE 15

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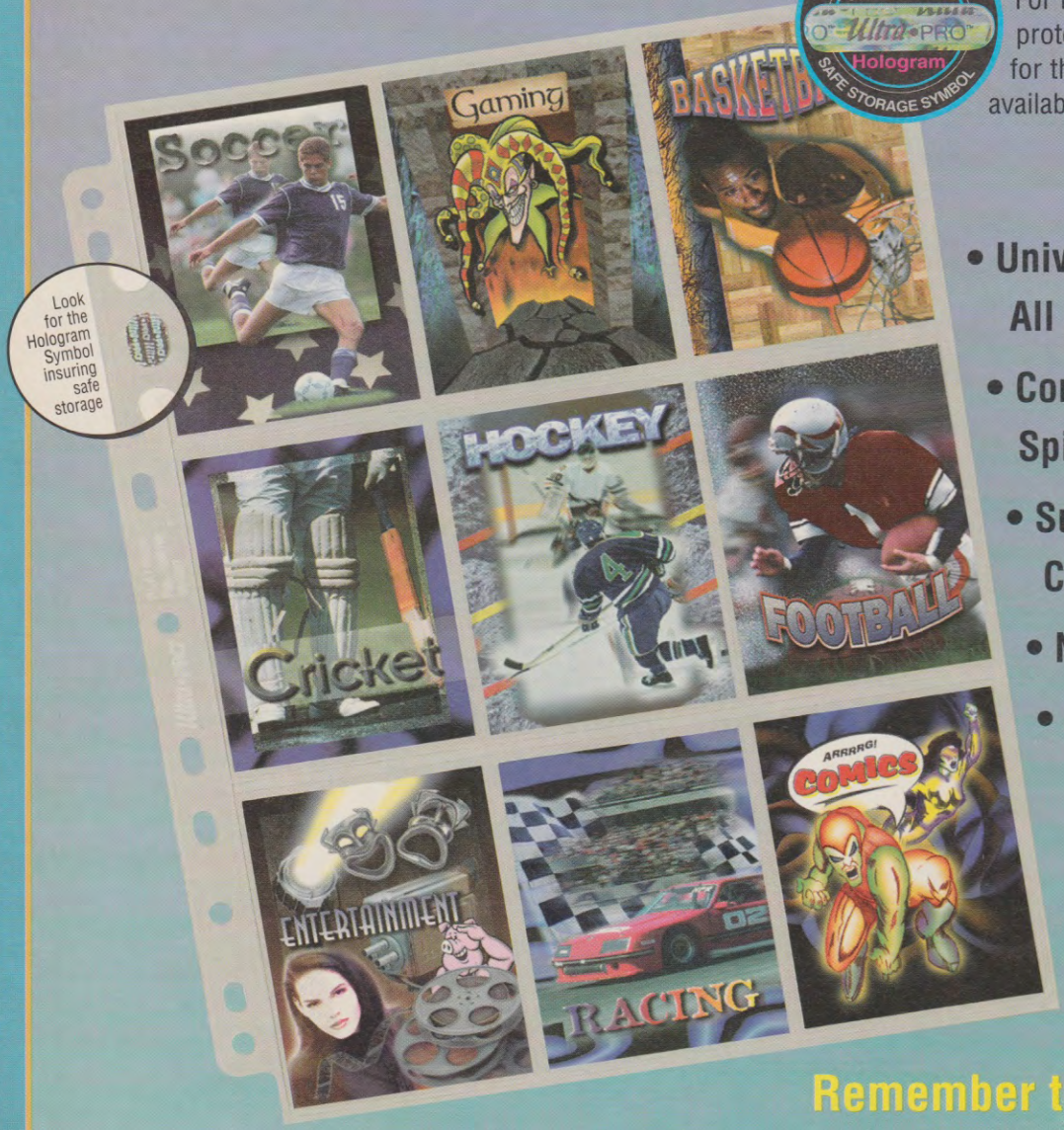

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This issue would have been impossible without... **xxxxxxxx**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **xxxxxxxxx**

Hello to you, and goodbye from me

I've got a revelation, for I've been gazing into the future...

And I've got something to worry about. I can see a time, a not-too-distant time, when your's truly will be working not on **arcane**, everyone's favourite roleplaying and collectable card game magazine, but on a strange, esoteric organ going by the name of *T3*. Technology will be within my grasp, technology of unprecedented capabilities, of unparalleled power and of strange, almost alien, design.

My vision has extended further, to a time when another man fills my seat in the **arcane** office, reading *Call of Cthulhu* sourcebooks in my place, and speaking to the rest of the team as only I do now (ie. with an authority which gets largely ignored). This man, his name is unfamiliar to me. It is... DAN JOYCE!

Wait. Now, I remember that name. Mr Joyce was the author of the highly acclaimed 'World Builder' series of features which ran through the first five issue of **arcane**. Oh, and he's the guy who regularly runs an *AD&D* campaign here in Bath, and, yes, he was involved with **arcane** when it was launched way back in 1994. It's becoming somewhat clearer now – perhaps this man could do my job, after all, perhaps (gulp!) he could even do it better than me! OH NO – PERHAPS 'THEY'RE' OUT TO GET ME! MAYBE THIS ISN'T SOME DREAM-LIKE EXPERIENCE, PERHAPS IT'S THE...

T R U T H !!!

Ahem. I feel much better now. I know it's for the best. I must leave here, to a new place, where the grass is greener and where the birds sing like larks. I know that I've had fun, grasping the helm of the good ship **arcane** and guiding it through choppy waters to the mill-pond that is issue 15. But alas, all good things must come to an end, and the end is upon this particularly good one. I am off now, I shall return in name, but my body shall be elsewhere (like, 40 feet down at the other end of the office).

Thanks for the flowers, and the chocolates, and the letters of good will (well, I got some of the latter). Editing **arcane** really has been the pinnacle of my journalistic career so far, but the pastures of much newness call (as does the chance to get to play around with flash new hi-fi equipment, TVs, computers, gadgets and cars, and then to write about them).

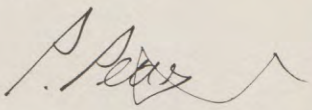
Over the last nine months on **arcane** I've seen it go from strength to strength. There were a few reservations about the longevity of **arcane** when it was originally launched. But hopefully after 15 issues you're all well and truly convinced that we're around to stay (or, at least, the magazine is). This next year will see **arcane** continue to improve under the control of its new editor. I know that he has got some ideas of his own, and from what I've heard I'm sure you'll like them – so I'm confident that I'm leaving **arcane** in good hands.

Anyhow – onwards! You'll still be seeing me pop up in the magazine from time to time, writing the odd (as in infrequent, rather than strange) feature and a review or two. I'll be busy beavering away on my new magazine, so time will indeed be precious, but I'll make every effort to keep my hand in, should Dan be in agreement. But, before I burst into tears and blubber all over my trusty computer, let me cease the goodbyes and let you know what's going on in this, my final issue of **arcane**...

Paranoia is something that we've all suffered from at some point ("What, me? I've never suffered from paranoia – what are you getting at?"), but how would you feel if you were paranoid all of the time? We're addressing that very issue in our feature on conspiracy theories and how to base campaigns upon them. Creating a sense of paranoia in your players is easy to do, but only when you know how – and you'll know exactly how to do that by the time you've finished reading this month's cover feature.

Hand-in-glove go this month's Encounter (the MegaCasino – inspired by 'that' film) and a feature on how to introduce organised crime gangs into your games. The latter looks at how these gangs are constructed, where they hang out, and what they get up to when the rest of us are asleep. As they say at the end of *CrimeWatch,* don't have nightmares.

And reviews! We've got a stack of them, with a corking write-up of the new release of *Ars Magica* at the top of the pile. Oops. Running out of space, just enough left to say "bye."



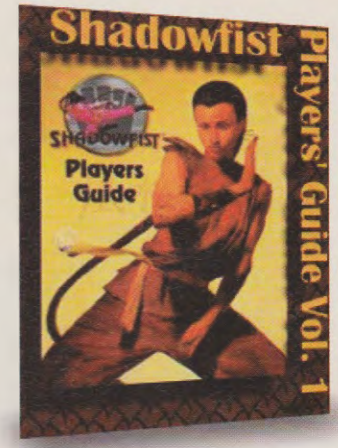
Paul Pettengale, Editor

"Over the last nine months I've seen arcane go from strength to strength... We're around to stay."

NEWS

News from around the gaming industry brought to you by **arcane** every month.

The Sec



You too can be a super *Shadowfist* player, with the help of the *Player's Guide* which is due for release in the New Year.

In a Dream

• The new expansion/stand-alone release for *Mythos* is called *Dreamlands* and you can read about it on page 10.

The Rabbit's Here

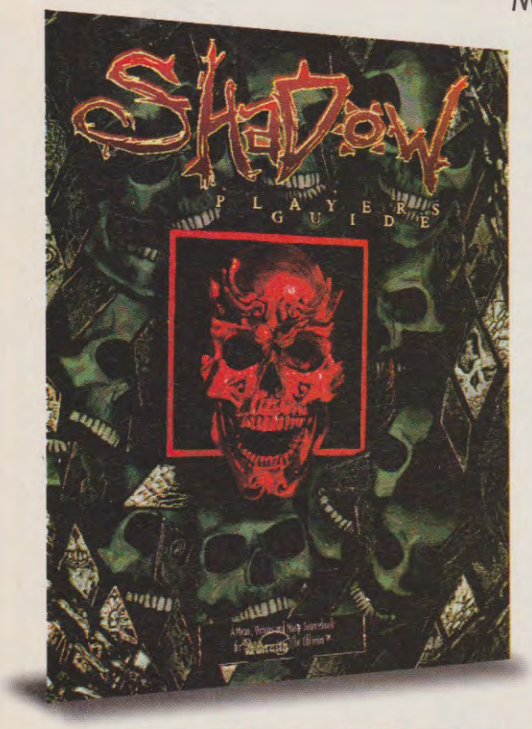
• Read all about the release of *Usagi Yojimbo*, the roleplaying game all about a samuri rabbit on page 12.

Combo Compo

• Win a box of *Visions* cards for *Magic: The Gathering* by entering our taxing compo on page 13.

Busy Christmas for White Wolf

More *World of Darkness* releases on the way.



A stand-alone expansion for *Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt* is on its way from White Wolf. Look out for a review in arcane soon.

GRANDEUR
HUNTSMAN'S SNARE
You've triggered a huntsman's snare. You'd best break free before the hunter returns. You cannot retreat from this Wayley. Discard this Wayley when it's defeated.

While most of us have been thinking about nothing but ripping open our pressies, stuffing ourselves with turkey and Christmas pudding, visiting the family and moaning about all the rubbish films on TV, the staff at White Wolf have been extremely busy putting the finishing touches to a whole load of new releases.

For a start, there's the second release in the *Arcadia* collectable card game, based on the *Changeling: The Dreaming* roleplaying system. *Arcadia: King Ironheart's Madness* can be played as either a stand-alone game, or combined with the cards from *Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt* (**arcane** 11). The game takes place in the kingdom of Middlemarch, ruled by the Mad King Ironheart, and the players of the game take the roles of heroes standing against him. The aim of the game is to gather allies and find the secret of Ironheart's power before his armies crush the forces of Lord Gamine and finally conquer all of Arcadia.

Arcadia: King Ironheart's Madness features new Leagues, Waylays, Races, Merits and Flaws for players to use in their struggles. As with *The Wyld Hunt*, the game will be sold in Story packs and Character packs, each of which contain 15 cards. All you need to start playing is one of each and two six-sided dice. If White Wolf has managed to solve some of the rules problems that plagued *The Wyld Hunt*, it might turn out to be a very good game indeed.

As well as CCGs, though, White Wolf is also about to release a couple of important supplements for its *World of Darkness* roleplaying games. *Mummy Second Edition* is more than a simple update of the original book, it's been completely revised and rewritten to bring it up to date with the rest of the World of Darkness. Fully compatible with all the games in the series, *Mummy Second Edition* not only includes full details of the immortal dead, it also features full rules allowing players to take on the role of one of these powerful creatures.

On a similar otherworldly note comes the long-awaited *Shadow Player's Guide* for *Wraith: The Oblivion*. Fully compatible with the second edition of the game, the *Shadow Player's Guide* contains a wealth of new material to help players portray the dark side of their fellow players' characters. In addition to a number of in-depth discussions concerning the nature of the Shadow, its aims, and its powers, the *Shadow Player's Guide* also features new rules covering these vicious personalities.

Look out for full reviews of all these White Wolf releases in the next issue of **arcane**, which hits the newsstands on Friday 24th January.

COMING SOON

ret War continues...

COMING SOON

Daedalus Entertainment returns with two new books.

After some delays, Daedalus Entertainment is gearing up for the release of its next two books, one for the utterly superb *Feng Shui* roleplaying game, and one for the equally impressive *Shadowfist* collectable card game, both of which share the same background (and both of which were reviewed way back in **arcane** 1).

Back for Seconds, for *Feng Shui*, takes the most popular and important characters from the *Shadowfist* card game and translates them into *Feng Shui* terms, complete with details of their backgrounds, personalities and goals. Not only will this let you throw some of the meanest bad guys in the Secret War at your PCs, but it should provide a wealth of story ideas, plots and inspiration for everything from short one-shot adventures right through to whole campaigns.

"*Back for Seconds* should provide a wealth of story ideas and plots."

No prizes for guessing the subject of the even longer-awaited *Shadowfist Players' Guide Volume 1*. Within the pages of this book will be a complete guide to every aspect of playing *Shadowfist*, from combat tactics to the best card combos. In addition there'll be a large section of hints and tips on deck design, including details of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the Factions, and various strategies you can use to win.

Both of these books are currently in production, although no firm release date has been set so far. Look out for full reviews in future issues of **arcane**.

Rache Bartmoss' Brainware Blowout

Everything you ever wanted to know about Netrunning and more...

Coming soon from R Talsorian Games, *Rache Bartmoss' Brainware Blowout* is being described, sparing modesty, as the 'ultimate compendium of *Netrunner* hardware and software' for the *Cyberpunk 2020* roleplaying game.

Brainware Blowout collects together every cyberdeck, program and all the related electronic gadgets ever published by R Talsorian into one volume, making it very easy to find whatever you want or need. Included will be material from the main rulebook, *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net*, all four *Chromebooks*, and a whole host of other supplements, sourcebooks and adventures.

In addition to the gear itself, the book will also feature complete compilations of all the various rules you need to run the Net in the *Cyberpunk* game. Whether you want to modify your deck or program your own killer utilities, everything you could possibly need will be in this single book.

As if that wasn't enough to tempt any sane *Cyberpunk* player or referee, though, R Talsorian is also going to include over 100 new bits of hardware and software based on those created by Wizards of the Coast for the *Netrunner* collectable card game (**arcane** 6). Featuring the artwork from the cards themselves, the new gear should offer even more possibilities for *Netrunner* PCs to play around with. Also included will be some notes and suggestions for using the card game to simulate runs during play.

Rache Bartmoss' Brainware Blowout is due to be released over the Christmas period. As ever, look out for a full review in **arcane** in the not-too-distant future.

And besides...

Deadlands sold out!

If you were hoping for a copy of the rather excellent *Deadlands* roleplaying game (**arcane** 13) for Christmas, you may well have been disappointed. Pinnacle Entertainment, the publisher of the game, has announced that the entire first print run has sold out in less than three months. The limited edition hardcover version of the rules went even faster, disappearing from the shelves in just over two weeks.

Pinnacle is currently arranging a second printing of both the soft and hardcover versions of the main rulebook in order to meet demand, which should be available by the end of January. In the meantime the referee's screen and adventure booklet, *Marshal Law*, is still available, and both the first 'dime novel' adventure pack, *Perdition's Daughter*, and the deluxe hardcover sourcebook, *The Quick and the Dead*, are still on schedule for release at around the same time.

Gold Rush Games wants you!

With plenty of new games and supplements on the way, including books for both the *Usagi Yojimbo* roleplaying game and the *Sengoku* roleplaying game which has replaced *Bushido 3rd Edition*, the folks at Gold Rush Games are currently looking for some new artists to work on a number of forthcoming projects in a variety of genres, including science fiction, fantasy, superhero and feudal Japan.

If you think you've got what they're looking for, you should submit at least one sample of black and white line art (no smaller than 5" by 7") to Gold Rush at:

Gold Rush Games
PO Box 2531
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USA

The company asks that if you want a reply or an acknowledgement of receipt of your sample, please include a SSAE.

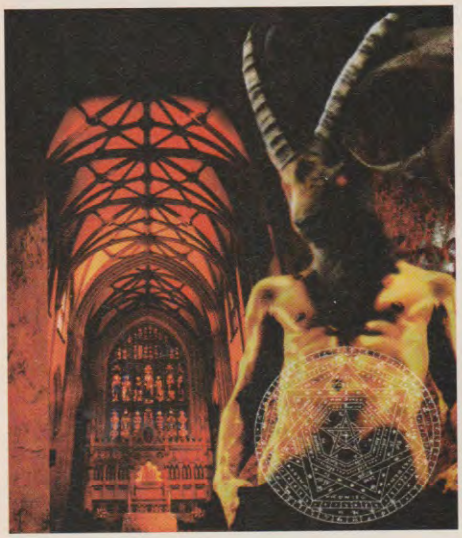
More Dragon Storm soon

Black Dragon Press is about to publish two new releases for its *Dragon Storm* roleplaying game, which is based around collectable cards (**arcane** 9). *The Kanchaka Campaign* is the first *Dragon Storm* expansion set, featuring a wide variety of new cards for the game, including monsters, equipment, spells, locations and more. *The Dragon Storm Adventure Book 1*, on the other hand, is packed full of ideas and suggestions for possible *Dragon Storm* adventures, including hints and tips for referees on how to construct their own campaigns. We should have full reviews of both of these in the next issue of **arcane**.

Conspiracy frenzy!

Three new *Conspiracy X* books for the new year.

COMING SOON



New Millennium Entertainment has announced details of three more supplements for its rather good *Conspiracy X* roleplaying game of modern horror and alien invasion (**arcane** 7).

The first, which is called *Cryptozoology,* will be a 128-page book detailing the study of unknown species of life on Earth. Cryptozoologists study mysterious creatures such as Bigfoot, the Yeti, the Loch Ness Monster and other similar creatures reported all over the globe. The sourcebook will reveal the truth behind these sightings in the *Conspiracy X* world, together with hints and ideas on integrating them into your *Conspiracy X* campaign. In addition there will be details of two new background organisations for player characters – The Royal Cryptozoology Society and the shadowy Titanidae. As well as full details of both, there will be new advantages and disadvantages, and new 'pulling strings' options for characters working for them.

Next will come *Forsaken Rites: The Supernatural Sourcebook.* Although Aegis is dedicated to protecting the Earth from extraterrestrial influences, aliens are not the only threat to the future of humanity. The mysterious forces of the supernatural have plagued mankind since its first faltering steps, and as the population grows, so too does the power and danger of this misunderstood but very real menace. *Forsaken Rites* will explore the world of the supernatural in *Conspiracy X,* uncovering the true origin of this primal force that could prove to be our saviour or our doom.

The last new book is currently titled *Visitations,* and will look at the various phenomena that have been claimed to be angels. Are these strange beings messengers from a higher power, dedicated to protecting humanity, or are they less than divine in both nature and intention? The *Visitations* book should explain all.

Crytozoology is due to be released in January, with *Forsaken Rites* to follow in February. No release date has been set for *Visitations,* and work continues apace on the long-awaited *Aegis Handbook,* which should also be published early in 1997. Look for full reviews in future issues of **arcane**, and more news as we get it.

Second draft of Exile released

Mark Rein•Hagen's science fiction epic is still growing.

The second draft of the playtest rules for the *Exile* roleplaying game has been released on the Internet. *Exile* is the brainchild of Mark Rein•Hagan, who's previous credits include *Vampire: The Masquerade* from White Wolf, and it will be the first release in the new Null Cosm setting that he has created.

As explained previously in **arcane** (see news in **arcane** 12), *Exile* is being designed by the Null Foundation, a non-profit organisation run by the creators of the setting, which will license the rights to publish the game and other materials to White Wolf.

The second release of the playtest rules is a lot more complete and refined than the original version, although there's still lots of work to be done yet. You can download them in various formats from the Null Foundation's World Wide Web page which is at `http://www.null-f.org/`

The Null Foundation has also announced that Joshua Timbrook has joined the *Exile* design team as Conceptual and Art Designer. Timbrook's previous credits are impressive, and include his acclaimed work on *Vampire: The Masquerade, Werewolf: The Apocalypse, Mage: The Ascension, Wraith: The Oblivion, Changeling: The Dreaming, Rage* and *Arcadia* for White Wolf. He's already begun early sketches and designs for various elements of the Null Cosm setting.

Mythos: The Dreamlands

COMING SOON

Explore a whole new dimension of horror.

Chaosium, publisher of the classic *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game, is about to release a new stand-alone expansion for the *Mythos* collectable card game, based on the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG and the works of HP Lovecraft.

The original limited edition of *Mythos* allowed your Investigator to wander 'Lovecraft country', Europe and the Middle East, and *Mythos* Standard opened up the horrors of Kingsport, New York and Vermont. And now *The Dreamlands* opens up a completely new dimension.

Lovecraft wrote of this bizarre alternate world in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath, The Doom that Came to Sarnath* and several other stories. *The Dreamlands* expansion features all of the strange places and incredible beings that can be found there, including such lovely things as the Cats of Ulthar, the Zoogs of the Enchanted Woods, the Water-Lizard of Mnar and the legendary men of Leng.

Your Investigator can visit places as strange as the far side of the moon or the Castle of the Great Ones on Kadath in their quest, and will find new Tomes, Artifacts, Spells and more – that is, if they can somehow manage to keep their sanity intact.

The Dreamlands features 200 new cards sold in 60-card starter decks and 15-card booster packs, and will be entirely compatible with the current *Mythos* sets. As with the original *Mythos,* it will be a limited edition release, and will not be reprinted. There'll be a full review in the next issue of **arcane**.

The Wildstorm roleplaying game

COMING SOON

Pinnacle Entertainment to produce an RPG based on the best-selling comics series.

Rather than simply basking in the success of its *Deadlands* RPG (**arcane** 13), Pinnacle Entertainment has just announced that it is to begin work on a new roleplaying system based on the Wildstorm line of superhero comics.

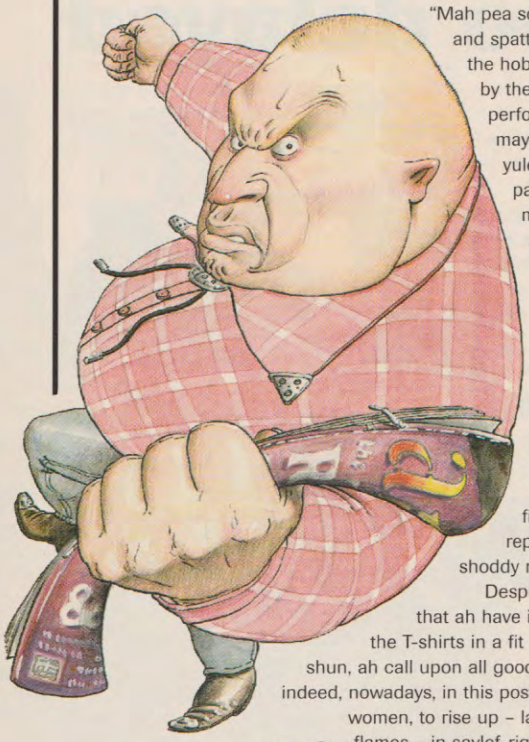
Wildstorm is acclaimed artist and writer Jim Lee's division of Image Comics, responsible for several successful lines, including the titles *WildC.A.T.s, Gen13* and *DV8*. Although there is already a collectable card game based on the Wildstorm characters *(Wildstorms,* reviewed in **arcane** 2), this will be the first roleplaying system based on any of Image's comics.

Pinnacle will be responsible for creating and designing the game, which will be distributed by Wildstorm Productions. Matt Forbeck, co-designer of the *Wildstorms* CCG, will head the design team for the game, which is tentatively scheduled for release in the summer of 1997. The basic rules will include full details of the *WildC.A.T.s* characters, and a range of sourcebooks will feature the characters from the other Wildstorm comics.

We'll be bringing you more news about this new game soon, and look out for a full review as soon as it's finished.

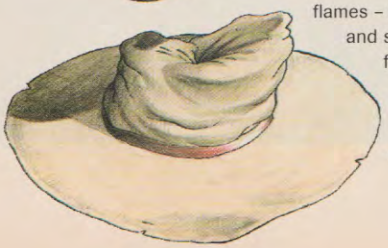
Seymour J Clancy

Seymour's got his trousers on this month. But it looks like pants down for the rest of us...



"Mah pea soup bile is boiling up and spattering elements on to the hob. Ah have bin saturised by the **arcane** in its pictoreal perforayshun of mah panto-mayhem in the passed yuletime. This ridiculous parroty, rather than daunt me, has only re-newed mah figure to destroy roleplaying and its vileness – and the **arcane** and all it stands for – through the means of sabotage from within. Observe me irradiate sections of this publicay-shun and eliminate some of its finest adversaries and replace them with some shoddy replicants.

Despite the unfortunate fact that ah have introvertedly burned all the T-shirts in a fit of violent conflaguray-shun, ah call upon all good-naychedley men, and indeed, nowadays, in this post-feminist earhole, women, to rise up – lahk a phoenix from the flames – in saylef-righteous indignay-shun, and support me in abusing **arcane** as a forum for hideous vitriol and short-sighted eye-deals." *(You'll have to discuss that with the editor – Ed.)*



Win a copy of The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

arcane COMPO

And an exclusive *Daggerfall* letter opener!

One of the most delayed PC games of all time, *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall* from Bethesda Softworks and Virgin Interactive Entertainment has now finally been released (see the review in last month's issue). Although something of a flawed masterpiece, it still comes closer to recreating the scope and freedom of a tabletop roleplaying game than any other computer game, and offers literally months of gameplay.

To celebrate, we've got a copy of the game and no less than five limited edition *Daggerfall* 'daggers' to give away. All you have to do to win is answer the following question...

Q What was the name of the first game in The Elder Scrolls series?

You can either write your answer on a postcard or e-mail it to us at the following addresses. Be sure to mark your entry 'Is this a rather spiffing little letter opener I see before me?'

arcane, Future Publishing Ltd,
30 Monmouth Street,
Bath, Avon,
BA1 2BW England

arcane@futurenet.co.uk

The laws of the land

1. All entries must arrive in the **arcane** office by Friday 7th February, 1997.
2. Employees of the guilds of Future Publishing, Virgin Interactive Entertainment and Bethesda Softworks are not allowed to enter. Even if they really want to.
3. Only one entry per person. The names of any disreputable elements who enter multiple times will be given to the Dark Brotherhood.
4. The editor's decision is backed by the power of the Emperor.

Famous for 15 Minutes

Lewis Benzie of Kilmarnock first got turned on to roleplaying by the thrill of driving a bullet header past an orc goalkeeper. This was over ten years ago, and we're sure he's moved on since. He may even have extended his career by going into management and playing Dunedin Games' *Tribal Kingdom Soccer* – who can say?

Where was I? Something about Man Utd playing an orc in goal? No, I remember now. The inspiration for the orc footy scenario seems to have come from *Tucker's Luck*, the underrated *Grange Hill* spin-off for people who had been the same age as the characters of the original show but were now old enough to buy booze.

One show, recalls Lewis, began with Tucker and his mates sitting round a candle-lit table playing *D&D*. Tucker, being un-versed in roleplaying matters, attempts to head-butt an orc. "That's not in the rules," chirps up a girl in a distinctly east London accent and, after consultation with the DM, who obviously fancies the girl and is not disposed to interpret the rulebook to suit the occasion, the proposed nut–job fails to connect. Tucker left the game soon afterwards, saying that he really liked it. However, he must have felt a little cheated because he was last seen running a fruit 'n' veg stall in Albert Square, and apparently has little time for games. Which is a shame. Perhaps if the cast of *EastEnders* roleplayed once a week they wouldn't worry so much...

Anyway, if you see Grant and Phil poring over the *Monster Manual*, or something like that, write to us at:

15 Minutes, arcane, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW

Or e-mail us at:

arcane@futurenet.co.uk

...and we'll print your findings. Unfortunately, circumstances beyond our control have caused a bit of a run on the **arcane** T-shirts recently, but we have a plan, so please bear with us.

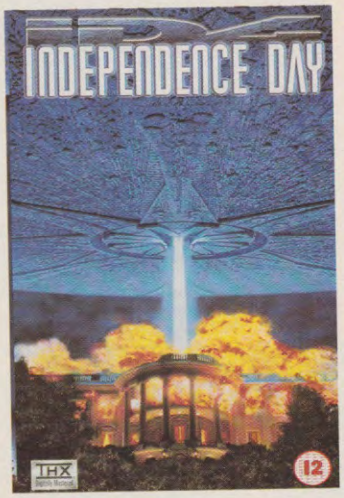
Video, Videos, Videos

There's a host of video releases to look forward to, of a distinctly science fiction bent.

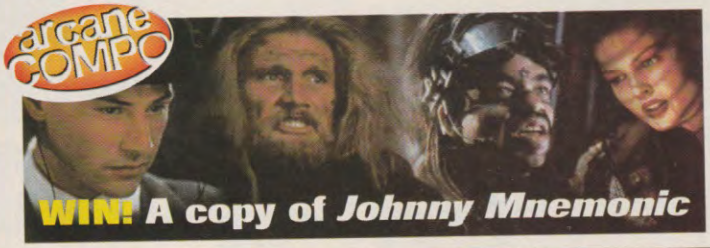
The 'ultimate hard drive' is, as you'll know if you've seen *Johnny Mnemonic*, the human brain. And if you haven't seen the film hopefully we've tempted you. *Johnny Mnemonic* is being released to buy on 13th January, £12.99 for the standard version, £14.99 for the wide-screen edition.

The aliens are coming on 10th February, when *Independence Day* is being released to rent on video. And finally, the first series of *Babylon 5* will be available to rent as of 24th January. There are six volumes, each containing four episodes.

We've got five copies of *Johnny Mnemonic* to give away, thanks to 20th Century Fox. The first five people pulled from our VR helmet get the goods, providing they can answer this question:



Q Which actor leads the cast in *Johnny Mnemonic*?



Rules

1. Only one pop per person.
2. Employees of Future Publishing and 20th Century Fox have to buy their own copy.
3. The editor has the final say.
4. Send entries to: 'Hit Me', **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW by Friday 14th February.

Usagi Yojimbo delayed

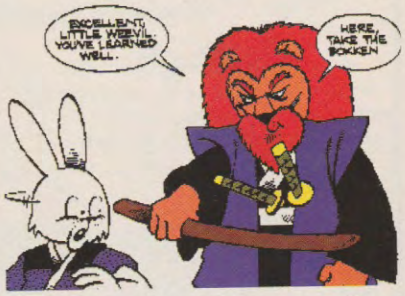
The rabbit samurai game is put back again.

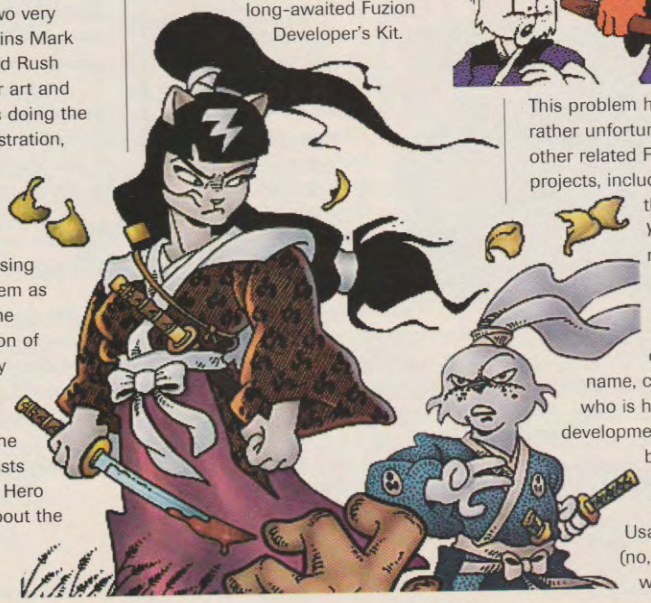
Gold Rush Games has announced another delay in the production of the *Usagi Yojimbo* roleplaying game. After having been put back to December 1996, the company is now intending to release the game early in 1997.

"We are waiting on two very important elements," explains Mark Arsenault, president of Gold Rush Games. "In short, the cover art and the rules. Tom Luth, who is doing the colouring for the cover illustration, has been very busy, and work on the *Usagi* roleplaying game cover is not yet completed."

"In addition we are using the new Fuzion game system as the core rules for *Usagi,"* he continues. "The final version of the Fuzion system has only recently been completed and made available to us."

Mike Pondsmith of the Fuzion group, which consists of R Talsorian Games and Hero Games, was apologetic about the delays. "Due to the lengthy process of developing a joint system between two companies and two design teams, not to mention the process of playtesting and development, the Fuzion group regrets that it has been delayed in the release of the long-awaited Fuzion Developer's Kit.





This problem has in turn caused the rather unfortunate delay of several other related Fuzion Developer projects, including, through no fault of their own, the *Usagi Yojimbo* and *Sengoku* roleplaying games."

The *Usagi Yojimbo* roleplaying system is based on the comic character of the same name, created by Stan Sakai, who is helping in the development of the game. Loosely based on the legendary Japanese swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi, Usagi is a samurai rabbit (no, we're not joking) who wanders the lands of

arcane COMPO

A full display of Visions cards for Magic: The Gathering

Use the cards on the front of this issue of arcane to create a *Magic* card combo and win yourself over 400 *Visions* cards.

Yes, a brand new box of *Visions* cards can be yours for no more than the price of a stamp if you can use your *Magic* playing skills to come up with a cracking card combo, using either one (or maybe both!) of the free preview *Visions* cards which are stuck to the front of this issue.

Here's the deal (ho ho): we want to see the most innovative card combo for *Magic* that you can come up with. It doesn't necessarily have to be way-powerful, just unusual or interesting, but useful none-the-less. You can use any number of *Magic* cards, though you'd be foolish to use more than three or four (because it's unlikely that you'd ever be able to play a combo with more than three or four cards in it). The combo must use at least one of the cards we're giving away with this issue, though it doesn't matter which set the other card or cards come from.

The winning combo will be picked from a short-list selected by the **arcane** team. That short-list will be given to Wizards of the Coast UK, who will then select the overall winner. You've got until Friday 14th February, 1997 to get your combo to us – though note, you don't have to send any cards, just the names of the cards in your combo and how the combo works. We'll print the winning combo in issue 18 of **arcane**, which goes on sale Friday 21st March.

WIN! A BOX OF *VISIONS* CARDS IN OUR EXCLUSIVE READERS' COMBO COMPO

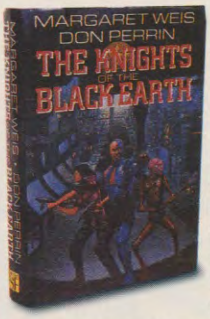
Rules

1. Only one combo per entrant.
2. Employees of Future Publishing and Wizards of the Coast should keep their ideas to themselves.
3. The editor, upon this occasion, passes the buck.
4. Any entries later than Valentine's Day shall be shredded.
5. Send entries to: 'Reader's combo compo', **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW.

feudal Japan. The comics have been a massive success, and are often cited as the inspiration for several other films and books. As soon as the game itself is released, we'll be bringing you a full **arcane** review.

COMPO WINNERS

Big boxes of books are being hurled around the multiverse, even as we speak.



4,500,000

The following lucky winners will receive copies of *Knights of the Black Earth*, parts I and II by Margaret Weis and Don Perrin: Paul Dalton of Farnborough, Al Gosling of Wisbech, Paul Hardy of Sheffield, SR Hughes of Wavertree, Elgan John of Carmarthen, Johnny Lambert of Charlton, Nicholas Minns of Wolsingham, Phil Nicholls of Gorleston, Andrew Pearce of Hornchurch and Steve Taylor of East Dereham.

Shock Horror

Copies of the two excellent horror anthologies which we reviewed in **arcane** 13 are speedily heading their way to: Richard Appleby of Matlock, Matt Broom of Leeds, Hywel Cross of Holyhead, Al Gosling of Wisbech, Ronan Kennedy of Galway, Hassni Malik of Epsom Downs, Nicholas Roberts of Tamworth, Ian Samuels of Colwyn Bay, D Walker of Liverpool and Tom Wright of York. Congratulations to all of this month's competition winners.

next month in arcane

THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT

AN ENTIRE ROLEPLAYING GAME CALLED *PUPPET LAND* FREE WITH THE NEXT ISSUE

John Tynes, gaming god, has written an entire roleplaying game called *Puppet Land*. And it's great. In **arcane** 16 we'll be presenting you with this macabre system, providing John doesn't pull the plug on us at the last minute.

HAVING A SUPER TIME

Whatever happened to the Superhero genre? Next month we take a look at this forgotten style of game, and explain why we all ought to be playing Superhero campaigns.

I'M GOING TO LIVE FOREVER

If only. However, there's nothing stopping us from playing characters that are effectively immortal, as we divulge in next month's feature on the subject.

PLUS THE ENCOUNTER NEWS REVIEWS AND UNMISSABLE FEATURES

arcane 16 will be on sale on Friday 24th January

To make sure of your copy of arcane every month either subscribe using the card in this issue or fill in this handy form and give it to your newsagent.

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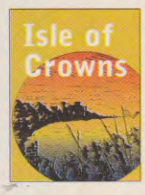
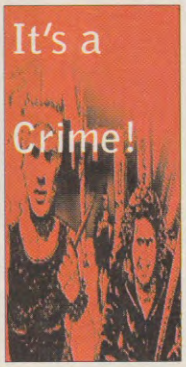


The World of Play by Mail



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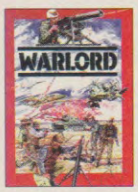

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Dungeons *and* Double-entry bookkeeping

"There is only one thing worse than being slagged off in the letters pages of **arcane**... and that's *not* being slagged off in the letters pages of **arcane**." Andrew answers his critics.

Andrew Rilstone

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

MORE AMMUNITION
If you don't like this column, you will almost certainly not like Andrew's Web page, which is at http//www.aslan.demon.co.uk/

NET GAMES
P.G. Wodehouse fans can find *The Drones* at http://www.granta.demon.co.uk/drones/index.htm

Y'KNOW, IT'S A FUNNY FEELING – being slagged off by people I don't know for things I never actually said. Seems to me that the people who were so terribly offended by my 'Starships and Stockbrokers' column (**arcane** 11) had not read much more than the title. I can't blame them. It was quite a long article, and it contained lots of big words.

Richard Crooke wrote (in **arcane** Scribblings 13) "Andrew... asked roleplayers to stop playing interesting characters and adopt the persona of a stockbroker..."

No, he didn't. In fact he said almost the exact opposite. Quote: "Most of my favourite characters are swashbucklers too. But *once in a while* I like to do something else."

That's the first thing to get out of the way. I suggested that we might play some down-to-earth characters *as well as* action-adventure types. I am not remotely suggesting that the Secret Police should visit anyone's house and take their copy of *Champions* away.

If the sound of jackboots are to be heard anywhere, it is in the letter writers who are angered by my suggestion that we might try something a little bit different once in a while. How dare I advocate diversity in our games! Richard actually goes so far as demanding that my column be got rid of as a punishment for this terrible thought-crime. Can the bonfires and book-burnings be far away?

Another letter writer, Danny Bourne, explains that it would be boring to roleplay a milkman. I agree. However, he neglects to mention that I did not suggest anyone *should* roleplay a milkman. The roles I suggested were:

1: Scientists and astronauts.
2: Colonists on an alien world.
3: A blacksmith in a fantasy city.
4: People in the real world whose jobs get them into interesting situations – lawyers, politicians, doctors, etc.

Every one of these ideas has been the subject of a successful, interesting book or TV series. I simply suggested turning them into successful, interesting RPGs.

It's not like this is a new idea. Sheila Thomas' game, *The Drones*, is available on the Internet. It's about the upper class twits who hang out with Bertie Wooster. **arcane** 3 included Phil Masters' game about English public schoolboys, and Antony Johnston wrote an article in issue 9 about using soap operas as a basis for an RPG. Does Antony get hate mail from the Thought Police?

> "How dare I advocate diversity in our games... Can bonfires and book-burnings be far away?"

The scientists-and-astronauts game is the only one I have tried. It lasted ten weeks. Okay, we were on a spaceship, but we were the most boring bunch of PCs you could imagine – academics, bureaucrats and computer programmers. Not a ray-gun between us. That made it twice as spooky when (after six weeks of nothing much happening) we finally met the aliens. Most of the players thought it was the best game they'd ever played in. But maybe you wouldn't have liked it. That's fine. Diversity is a good thing.

Sure, a story about how a housewife washed the dishes one morning would be boring. A story about a housewife who was washing the dishes one morning when she got a phone call from a guy in a cell at the local police station, who turns out to be the baby she gave away 17 years ago to an adoption agency, and never mentioned to her present husband... Now, that's interesting. Collar me at the next convention, and I'll run a scenario based on that premise. Wait 'til you find out what the kid's been arrested for, and who the witness is. I guarantee it won't be boring.

Now, in the grand scheme of things, it doesn't matter much whether the readership of **arcane** agrees with my opinions. But the existence of the Thought Police worries me because, from the day I first discovered *D&D*, and was forced to play a shit-boring scenario about killing orcs in a tunnel for no reason, I have been certain of two things.

1: Roleplaying games have the potential to be the most wonderful vehicle for creating and experiencing stories that the human race has yet produced.
2: They hardly ever fulfil that potential.

What's more, I think that roleplaying games will carry on failing to fulfil their full potential as long as we limit ourselves to exploring only one type of story.

Does it matter? I think it does. People often say that RPGs are just fun. I don't think RPGs are *just* anything. I think they are bigger than cinema, bigger than novels, bigger than virtual reality. I think we should try out as many types of game as possible – realistic games, fantastic games, tragic historical comical pastoral games. Sure, I want to run a game about people who band together to fight the flying saucers that invade the Earth. But I also want to run a game about a non-superheroic Victorian kid who runs away from the workhouse; and then one about a non-superheroic Jewish guy trying to find out if his grandad survived the camps.

I think that's what RPGs should be about – as well as being about religion and myth-making (like *Pendragon*), death and rebirth (like *Wraith*), making people laugh (like *Toon*) and about smashing through windows and throwing hand grenades at the bad guys (like *Feng Shui*). I think every referee should ask him or herself, 'What matters to me? What makes me happy, what makes me angry?' and use that as the basis for the campaign. I think our games should set out to tell the truth – the truth as we see it.

On the other hand, we could just kill more orcs.

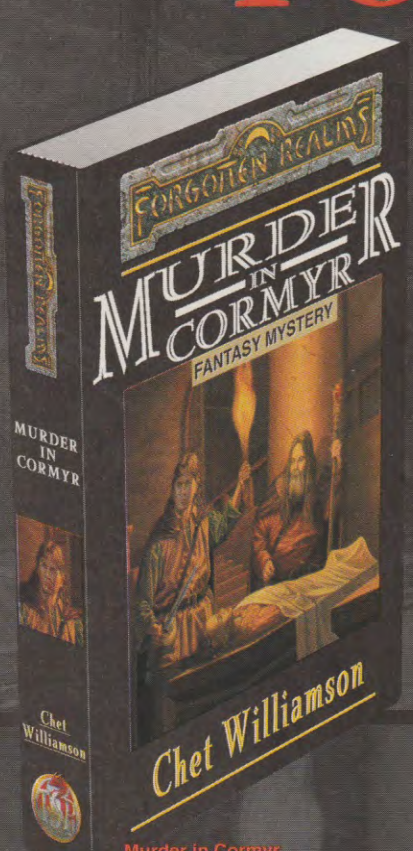
ALTERNATIVELY
Other down-to-earth RPGs include:
Bunnies and Burrows (non-superheroic rabbits go on quests to find food).

Teenagers from Outer Space (aliens try to get their homework done and babysit their bratty sisters).

Alma Mater (sex, drugs and rock'n'roll-playing in high school).

The Price of Freedom (in which suburban Americans fight the commies – see issue 13's Retro column).

MURDER for sale



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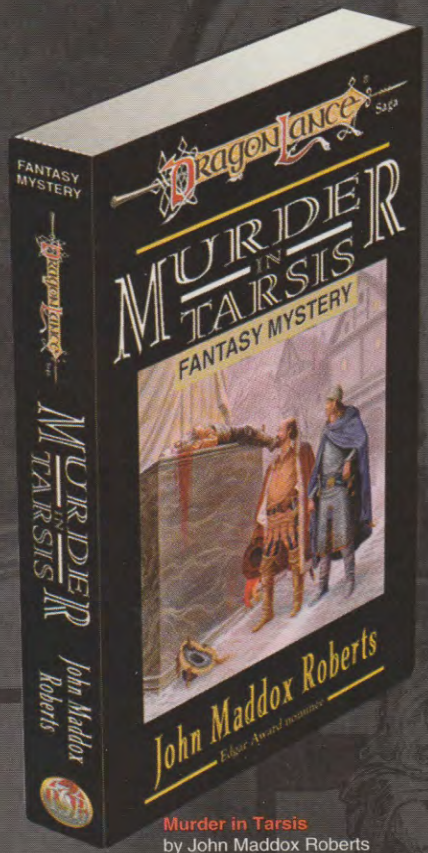

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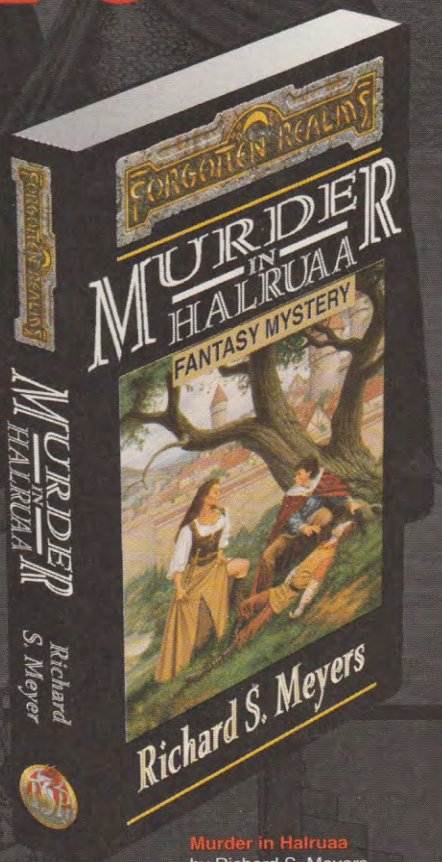

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What's in a game?

what's best? an extended RPG campaign? a CCG quickie? or an evening playing Monopoly with your mum and dad? **Johnny Lambert** doesn't see an awful lot of difference — they're all games to him.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT ROLEPLAYERS that makes them so precious? Just because you really love one kind of game doesn't mean you have to hate all the rest. And just because you're a roleplayer, doesn't mean there aren't any other types of games. Far too many people involved with this hobby of ours seem to think that their opinion of what makes a game good is the only valid one – that the game they like most is the best and all the rest are crap. This is a snobbish and, frankly, excruciatingly annoying attitude.

It's one thing for somebody to think that the games they play are best, but it's quite another to then go on to say that everything else is inadequate rubbish. We hear it so much within the hobby and the debate has even been given coverage in **arcane**, which should be above such petty bickering – that card games are a passing fad for half-hearted gamers, or that boardgames are only to be played at Christmas time with the family, or that *D&D* is only for kids and the anally retentive. It's a blinkered, partisan mentality that only serves to divide people who, basically, think the same way and get their leisure time enjoyment from doing pretty much the same kind of thing.

It's a football fan's mentality – "I support Arsenal so Spurs are crap." That's all right in football, because it's part of the fun and, of course, you're only saying it, you know it's not true. If it was, you wouldn't bother saying it in the first place. But playing games isn't like watching football. Just because someone thinks that *Call of Cthulhu*, for example, is the best game ever, doesn't mean they've got a right to slag off everyone who still prefers, again just for example, *D&D*. You might have very well thought out reasons for preferring one over the other and that's fair enough – that's why you play that particular game and not the other. But try saying that you might actually prefer messing about with elven magic to playing out some conspiracy-based puzzle game set in the 1920s, and they'll start looking down their noses at you and thinking, 'well, he's obviously not as much into his hobby as I am, otherwise he'd have put such childish things behind him and moved on a little. Or maybe he's just not as clever as me. Yes, that's probably it.'

> "It's one thing for somebody to think that the games they play are best, but it's another to say that everything else is rubbish."

The same goes for the CCG/RPG debate. It doesn't matter if it's an RPG or a CCG. It's a game. Games are fun. They're for people who like to take a bit of time out of the day-to-day drudgery and pretend things are different from how they really are. Anyone who plays Monopoly or even Trivial Pursuit is still a gamer – they're still looking for satisfaction from the same kind of cerebral activity. So why try to distinguish between so-called 'worthy' games and less involved stuff. Flippant nonsense they may be, but what does that matter? Is the *Star Wars RPG* really a 'serious' game?

I think this snobbishness is a British phenomenon – Europeans don't distinguish so much between games. Some Dutch roleplayers I know also play boardgames, enjoy the occasional CCG, one of them does a bit of PBM and they've all been out LARPing. That's not their favourite way to spend a weekend, but they're not scared to give it a go. The British attitude goes hand-in-hand with our attitude towards music. If something's cool, it's cool. But if it's not the argument is that it should be avoided. "Never listen to Elton John, even if he turns out a good song, because, er… because he's rubbish."

Gamers are like this. Boardgames are beneath them. They'd never admit to their roleplaying buddies that they might have actually enjoyed pretending to be a mega-rich capitalist buying up real estate in central London. Don't get me wrong, I'm not a Monopoly fan. I'm not a *D&D* fan, and I'm not a *Magic* fan either, but I don't think there's anything wrong with people playing these games. I don't think it makes them less evolved as gamers – they're just getting a different kind of kick. What's important is that people realise we're all gamers. Many of the people I play with also like to go down to the Valley to watch Charlton play football. They get enjoyment from that too, even though they're not actively participating in the game itself. Watching football isn't my scene, but if they like it, let them get on with it.

Gamers get a bad press from a lot of quarters outside the hobby who don't understand it. For example, people who write in the *Daily Mail* and who think they have a vague idea of what *"D&D*-style games" are, and like to use labels for things, particularly for things they don't understand. Why cause antagonism within the hobby by saying that all card games are crap or that all lengthy roleplaying campaigns are for saddos, or even that a game such as *Settlers* is 'only' a boardgame? Comments like this, and I'm thinking of LARP in particular now, generally come from people who don't know what they're talking about because they've never tried. This puts them, for me, on the same level as the *Daily Mail* hack.

Hold on a minute. Chess is a board game, so is Go, so is Backgammon – and if anyone thinks that Backgammon is an inferior game, I'll challenge them anytime. So next time your ref doesn't turn up, or the party's too small for a decent session, try a game of *Settlers* or even Triv. Okay, maybe that's going a bit far, but I think I've made my point.

TRY SOMETHING NEW Rumour has it that there are a lot of decent boardgames coming on to the market at the moment. Many are English translations of European games.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? If you have a point of view concerning **arcane**'s coverage of RPGs versus CCGs, or you think we should cover more boardgames (or less, even), write and let us know. We value your opinions.

ON THE SOAPBOX is your page – it's where we give you the opportunity to get something off your chest (as long as it's to do with the gaming industry, of course). The views expressed by you on this page aren't necessarily the views of **arcane**, or of the **arcane** editorial team. If you'd like to have your say, send in a piece of around 1,000 words long to: On the Soapbox, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Or e-mail it to: arcane@futurenet.co.uk

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ICE Inc. and Hobbygames Ltd. present *Dicemaster,*™ an exciting new fantasy dice game. Now players can enjoy complete, character-based adventures with nothing more than a beautiful set of custom-crafted dice. *Dicemaster's* tremendous replay value and broad array of intricate die images set it apart from the other dice games on the market. No other dice game offers you so many gaming options, or such wonderful artwork.

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- **Doom Cubes**™ (Booster Sets) — Each ≈4"x 4"x 2" box contains a dice tray and 8 dice (including either one 10-sided die or one 12-sided die). Once either or both players introduce(s) one or more *Doom Cubes*, they can play the "Advanced Game." ($5.95)

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Legends

This month **Matthew Green** takes a look at the award-winning *Legends II* game system, and the UK release of its latest scenario, *Swords of Pelarn*. He also has news of *Riftlords* — a science fiction PBM that **arcane** readers can start playing for free.

Great News

Another try-for-free play-by-mail system arrives in the UK. *Riftlords*, moderated by Time Patterns, is a new interstellar trading and combat game. Each player initially controls a small merchant enterprise consisting of just three spacecraft, and an objective to become the richest trader in the universe. Pirate ships are often encountered in the central regions of space, and as you get further out into the depths you have the opportunity to launch attacks on any rival players that you take a disliking to.

The basic rules and first three turns are completely free – thereafter fortnightly turns are £3 each. For further details contact: Time Patterns PBM Games, FREEPOST EX1049, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 2YZ

Finoldin Games in the UK

Also of interest this month is the literal French invasion of our great country. Finoldin Games, one of France's biggest PBM operators, has set up an office in Manchester of all places. If you happen to live in this area, be on the look-out for French-looking, beret-wearing people clutching large piles of envelopes, or purchasing excessive numbers of postage stamps. Finoldin is initially offering four games, the most prestigious of which is *Royal Alliances*, a diplomatic power game set in the 18th century.

Finoldin suggests taking part in its bilingual games so that English players may experience the challenge of playing against lots of French gamers. For further information contact: Finoldin Games, 2 Wigley Street, West Gorton, Manchester M12 5BA. Or, if you're French and want to play against English players: Finoldin Games, BP 102, 37301 Joue-les-Tours, France.

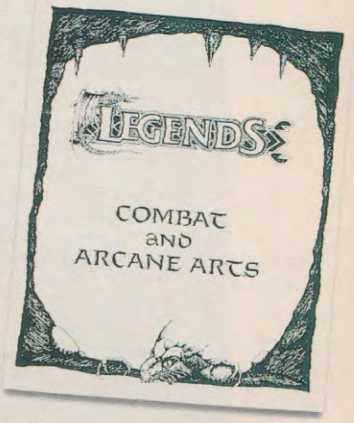
Legends, Swords of Pelarn

Harlequin Games, £20 start-up. Turns £3.30+ (less through e-mail)

At first glance what really strikes most people about this game is the small matter of a £20 start-up fee! A lot to pay for the purchase of a play-by-mail rules system, but this is no ordinary PBM because the quality of the start-up materials is more akin to the average off-the-shelf RPG. The start package consists of three richly illustrated rule manuals and the scenario sourcebook, a total of well over 300 pages, all well complemented with a full-colour poster-style map. Note, if you do play, clues to secret legends and adventures are scattered throughout both the text and the illustrations, so don't skip anything.

The scenario itself, *Swords of Pelarn*, features dozens of interwoven plot lines in a world drastically overpopulated with literally dozens of different fantasy races. The History of Pelarn, not surprisingly, is essentially the continual struggle of each of these races to either achieve stability and peace, or, for the darker races, dominance. Revolving around this central core of conflict is the existence of magic as a widespread means of power, or for some, enlightenment, and around the world individual characters of great skill have come forth to stake their claims and push the history of the world in the direction of their will.

Each player may control up to 30 of these characters, which can be tailored to allow pursuit of whatever aspect of the game is of most interest. The game can thus be played on many different levels and caters fully for players of both roleplaying and wargaming backgrounds. Over 5,000 different locations each offer many possibilities, and the more daring adventurer might well be able to explore lost cities and ancient towns right through the middle of the most bloodthirsty wars and battles. However, if you are such a player, be careful, because things can get very heated. Players who get caught up in some of the heavier fighting are likely to encounter a fair number of extremely unpleasant adversaries.



Warrior bands, adventuring parties, thieves, mercenary outfits, diplomatic merchants, even Overlords are all commonly played and cohesively rolled into the same game. All of these characters are part of the same world, either competing against each other or joining enormous factions that attempt to achieve some grand victory. The majority are 'power gamers', in that they seek to raise armies and conquer whatever they are able to. Each *Swords of Pelarn* game does have up to 200 players, though, so there is plenty of scope for diplomacy and making lots of new friends.

One of the best features of this play-by-mail system is the regular introduction of new scenarios, which go a long way towards attracting players from a more mainstream roleplaying background (adding yet further to the overall game atmosphere).

Swords of Pelarn offers an exceptional gaming environment, and one that is certainly worth serious consideration, especially if you have a connection to the Internet. Players who e-mail their turns to Harlequin not only get a 33 percent reduction in turn costs, but also some powerful front-end PC software to help them manage and organise their positions. For more information contact:

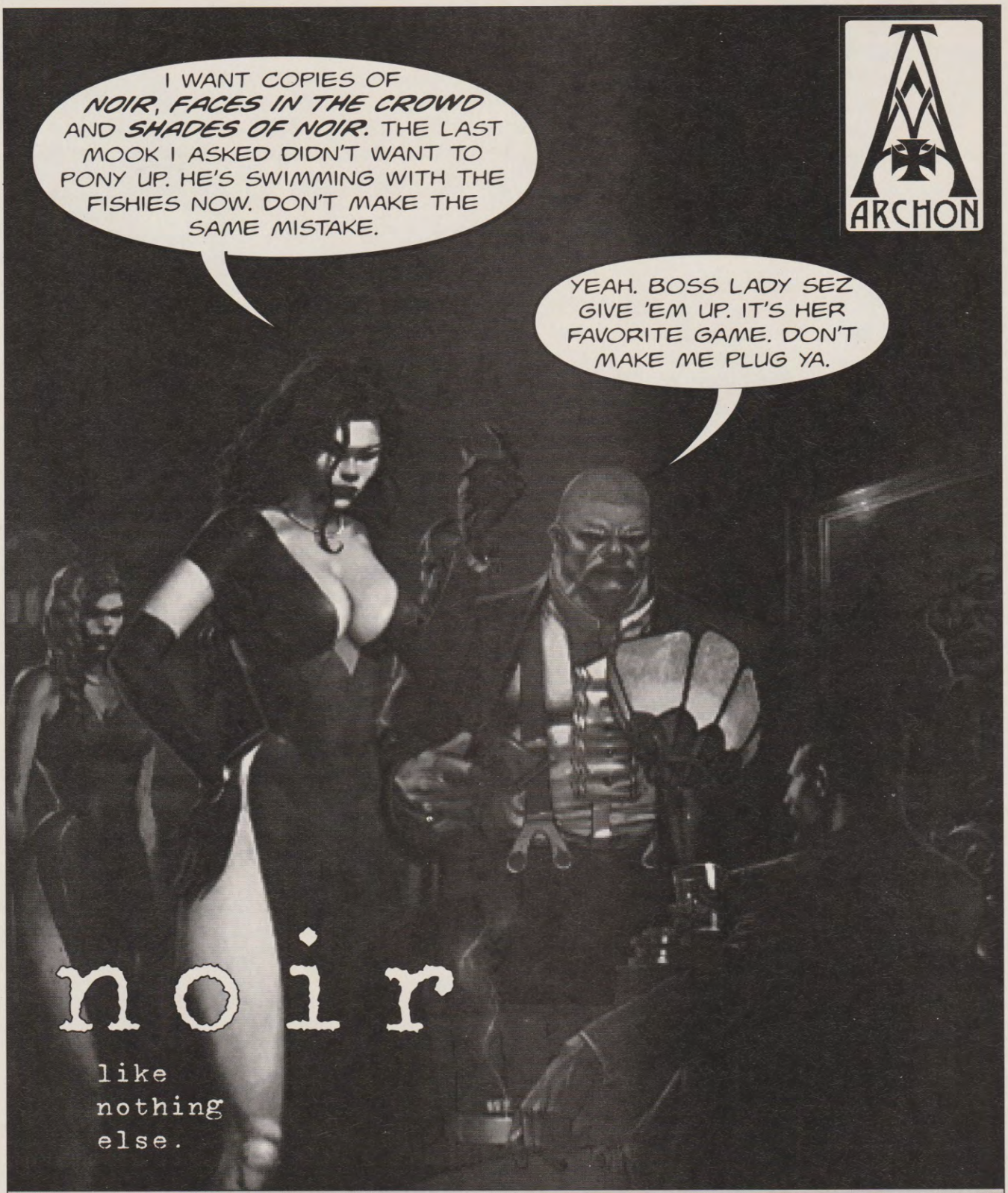
Harlequin Games,
41 Treherbert St, Cardiff,
CF2 4JN. Telephone/Fax
(01222) 667197

E-mail: harlequin.games@dial.pipex.uk
Web site: http://www.interpages.co.uk/harlequin

PBM answers

In answer to Gordon Campbell's question about PBM games in Australia (see last month's **arcane** Scribblings), you might like to try Dynamic Games which has a number of offerings including *Quest*, reviewed in **arcane** 11. For more information, write to: Dynamic Games, Box 707, Dapto, 2350, Australia.

Drop us a line **If you have any PBM related questions please feel free to drop us a line here at arcane. We're especially interested in hearing from anyone who's recently won a PBM game, so that you can pass any advice or tips on to other arcane readers. Apart from the world-wide fame and goodwill this would bring you, you might even be lucky enough to win yourself the ultimate in sexy leisurewear – an arcane T-shirt.**


I WANT COPIES OF NOIR, FACES IN THE CROWD AND SHADES OF NOIR. THE LAST MOOK I ASKED DIDN'T WANT TO PONY UP. HE'S SWIMMING WITH THE FISHIES NOW. DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE.
YEAH. BOSS LADY SEZ GIVE 'EM UP. IT'S HER FAVORITE GAME. DON'T MAKE ME PLUG YA.
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Star Trek: The Roleplaying Game

extremely successful when it was first released, this epic film license made for a great roleplaying game. phil clare throws down the gauntlet for game designers who share his sense of nostalgia.

Designed by Guy McLimore, Greg Poehlien and Dave Tepool

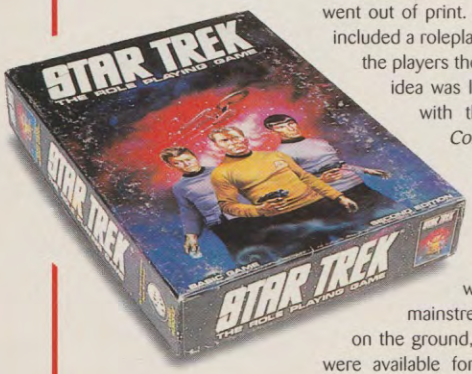
Published by FASA Corporation

£9.99

First Published in 1983

A WISE MAN ONCE SAID THAT RPGs and films have had a checkered history. Television, however, has been lucky, and only a handful of programmes have been responsible for RPGs. Having said that, one or two of them have proved to be real crackers, most notably FASA's *Star Trek: The Roleplaying Game*, which gave players the opportunity to split infinitives and not break the all-important Prime Directive unless, of course, the plot called for it.

In the early '80s FASA had a number of design teams batting around the idea of a *Star Trek* RPG, but neither it nor Paramount could agree on a manuscript, so as a last ditch attempt to secure the license FASA put a sixth team on it and gave it two weeks to come up with an outline. Incredibly, the team from Fantasimulations not only managed to produce an outline for the game everyone could agree on, but also produced the character generation, character combat and starship combat systems. Once accepted, FASA assigned this team the whole project. When it was released the game was an immediate success, and at the time soon became the second biggest-selling RPG in history, although admittedly it still trailed an awfully long way behind the ubiquitous *AD&D*.



Based on the original series, the boxed set contained three manuals in a fetching shade of pale blue and two ten-sided dice. The books consisted of a *Game Operations Manual* outlining how to run a *Star Trek* campaign, the *Star Fleet Officers Manual* which took you through the complicated process of character generation, and lastly everybody's favourite, the *Cadet Orientation Sourcebook*. It was this last book which created all kinds of controversy among *Trek*-heads, particularly for the rather obvious idea of not even trying to make sense of stardates used in the TV series, and inventing their own system which they used until the game went out of print. Also notable was the fact that the rules included a roleplaying starship combat system, which gave the players the chance to make like Sulu or Uhura. This idea was later added to by the same design team with the addition of the *Star Trek Tactical Combat Simulator*, which could be used as a stand-alone game or in conjunction with the RPG. It sold well and was later boxed with the RPG in a deluxe edition.

The game worked for a number of reasons. At the time the RPG hobby was still in its 'hack and slay' phase – mainstream science fiction RPGs were a little thin on the ground, and many players adapted the few that were available for use with a *Star Trek* background. It encouraged roleplaying rather than a 'zap and slay' style, which always resulted in a very short game anyway because combat was always terminal, and came with an enormous amount of support material including the usual adventure modules, sourcebooks, recognition manuals, deck plans and playing aids, the strangest of which was a Tricorder/Starship Sensors Interactive Display. Finally it did have the words 'Star Trek' on the box which meant it was always going to sell in large numbers.

The game wasn't without its critics, and these were mainly die-hard Trekkies who felt that the game never really met with their version of the *Star Trek* universe. However, anybody who actually played the game knows, of course, that they were wrong, and that with a bunch of like-minded players (so it didn't degenerate into a cliché-ridden session played for cheap laughs) it was roleplaying at its very best. Epic, cerebral and with a bit of ass-kicking thrown in for good measure.

The demise of *Star Trek: The Roleplaying Game* began with the growing popularity of FASA's other big title, *BattleTech*. FASA was keen to stress the future warfare possibilities in *Trek* and support material for the game began to reflect this, but despite the material's high quality and endorsement from the games-buying public, FASA fell out with the Fantasimulations team who wanted to concentrate on the less violent focus of the original TV series. The situation wasn't helped any by the return of Gene Roddenberry's interest in licensing during the development of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* – apparently he wasn't happy with the style of later support material. Rumour has it that the final straw was a sourcebook covering Federation ground forces which Paramount turned down and demanded withdrawal of, even though it had been sent to the distributors. Strange, then, that subsequent *Star Trek* series and movies have had strong military overtones.

Despite FASA finally losing the license, it does seem rather odd that there isn't a *Star Trek* RPG currently available despite interest in the past from TSR, Mayfair and Steve Jackson Games. Ironically, however, this is probably for the best because the *Star Trek* franchise is now highly formulaic, and let's not forget the creative differences FASA had not only with Paramount, but also the original design team. All this should make those of you who own a copy not only particularly smug, but also secure in the knowledge that the likelihood of another *ST:RPG* of the same quality appearing is pretty slim. And any game designers reading should take this as a challenge.

> **"It was roleplaying at its best. Epic, cerebral and with a bit of ass-kicking thrown in for good measure."**

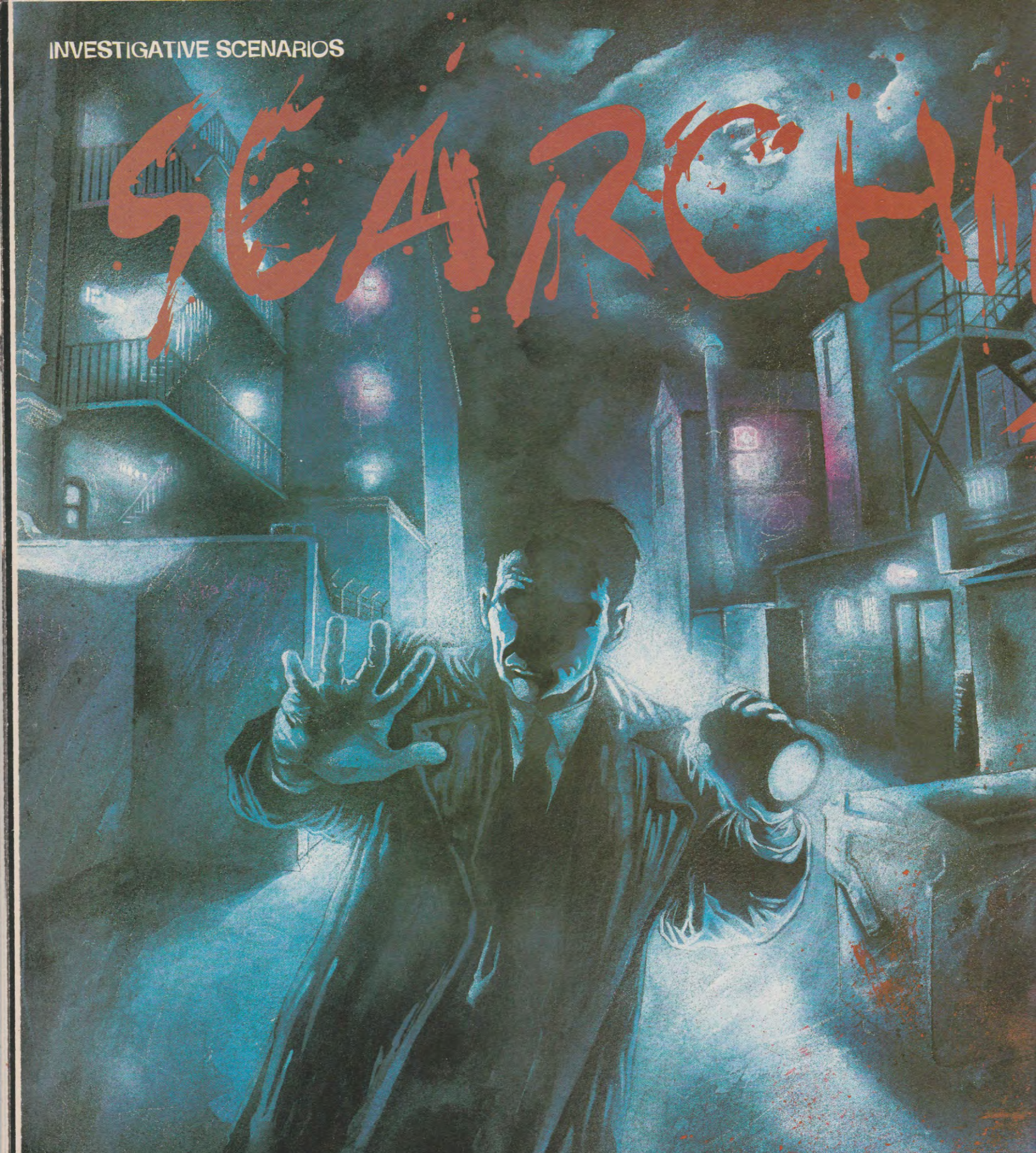
SALES SUCCESS

The Tactical Combat Simulator is thought, by the Fantasimulations design team, to have actually outsold the RPG.

RUMOURS ABOUND

Rumours regarding some of the *Trek* projects that never saw the light of day include a massive tactical board game called *Operation Armageddon*, which looked at an all-out war between the Federation and the Klingon and Romulan Empires.

SEARCH



Trust no one. Watch your back at all time. For 'they' are out to get you. Paul White explains how to run campaigns based on conspiracy and government cover-ups...

THE TRUTH FOR

the gaming magazine arcane CAMPAIGN IDEAS

What would happen...

...if a covert organisation wanted to take over the running of your favourite gaming magazine? Chances are you wouldn't even notice right away. You might realise there had been a change of editorial staff, but that happens from time to time. Gradually, you would come to realise that all was not how it should be in the **arcane** office. There would be no more letters offering (constructive) criticism of the last issue, only certain 'approved' releases would make it to the review pages, and the features would be designed not to improve the quality of your games, but rather to indoctrinate you into the organisation's way of thinking.

But who are these people, and what do they hope to achieve? How organised are they? If they can take over a magazine so easily, what else can they accomplish? How much have they infected our lives already? And what if we don't agree with their agenda, what can we do about it? If you complain too vociferously, do you find yourself being stalked by shadowy men in black coats, spied on while you go about your daily business? Will you awaken one night to the sound of your cupboards and drawers being rifled through, and the next minute find yourself running for your life pursued by an enemy you know nothing about for reasons you can't understand?

Okay, so that's unlikely to happen, but that doesn't stop it being possible. And it is this possibility that is so compelling. The thought that our lives could be turned upside down in the blink of an eye, that we could become embroiled in a sinister plot which strikes at the very heart of society and threatens the lives of everyone on the planet.

But we're not talking about a simple matter of reporting to the authorities and saving the day here. For a start, the authorities could well be the enemy. At the very least, they are unlikely to believe a word you say. No, for now you're on your own. But before you go any further, you need to know more about what you're up against. You need to know who they are, how powerful they are and what they want. Then you can work out how to stop them.

ARCANE INSPIRATION

If you're looking to expand the political background to your campaign, you should look back to our 'The Power and the Glory' feature in **arcane** 12 – see page 53 if you missed it.

A MATTER OF STYLE

Most of us find the concept of conspiracies intriguing, if a little disturbing. In the modern world, where information is so readily accessed and stored, it's more than likely that there are companies and organisations out there who know more about you and your family than you do. For most of us, that fact has little or no impact on our lives. What we get up to is unlikely to be of interest to a multinational corporation funding a revolution on the other side of the globe, or a government department covertly studying the remains of a possible alien spacecraft. But for your average Joe character in an RPG, mixing it with shadowy corporate types or government agents is part of the daily routine, which means you better start watching your back, because you never know when you're going to open the wrong file, or see something you shouldn't. For people who have a habit of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, the chances of getting caught up in something sinister are, at the very least, better than average.

So, having established that your characters are just the sort of people who are likely to poke their noses where other noses fear to poke, and thereby attract some dangerously unwelcome attention, you want to construct the kind of earth-shuddering conspiracy that would strike fear into the heart of the most foolhardy player.

Or do you? Sure enough, you want a campaign that's going to hold the players' attention, stretch their minds and challenge their roleplaying ability, but that needn't necessarily involve nail-biting suspense and edge-of-seat thrills. A campaign based around conspiracy theories can be played successfully in any number of styles.

MIND CONTROL
For ideas on how memory manipulation can be used to induce player paranoia, check out 'Mutations of the Mind' in arcane 13 – again, see page 53 if you missed it.

MINISTERIAL ACRONYM
The term 'Cabal' derives from the members of a five-man committee of ministers under Charles II, whose surnames happened to begin with the letters C.A.B.A.L.

If a touch of horror is your preferred gaming poison, then the potential for unearthing dastardly schemes to bring creatures of unutterable malevolence into the lives of mortals lurks in the shadows, awaiting your call. A conspiracy designed for a horror game might be run by Cthulhoid cultists, or dedicated followers of Tzeentch, devoted to the cause of bringing society to its knees at the hands/claws/tentacles of their otherworldly masters.

Battling supernatural forces whose power you can't hope to match, driven slowly insane by the sheer horror of it all, this style of campaign is not for the fainthearted. You would need to play up the relative weakness of the characters, the awesome, alien power of their enemies, and the terrifying scope of the consequences should the conspirators succeed in their scheme. One of the toughest challenges when refereeing a campaign of such intensity is convincing the players of the dire peril their characters face. Players often find it too easy to dismiss the threat, assuming that the referee wouldn't dream of allowing the conspiracy to succeed because it would disrupt the gameworld too much. Don't let them get away with that sort of intransigence. Be bold, even if it means the minions of darkness taking control of an entire city, or wiping out a sizeable chunk of the population. One mistake shouldn't mean irreparable disaster, but it should at least let them know that you're serious when you say the world is in grave danger. And who knows, if the conspiracy succeeds and your world is overrun by the minions of chaos, then you could find your campaign moving in entirely new and exciting directions.

DOWN TO EARTH

If, however, you prefer an earthly campaign, then a more traditional approach would be a variant on the modern thriller, where the opponents are almost as dangerous and equally single-minded, but at least they're human. Possibilities include a secret branch of the government, the anonymous owners of a powerful corporation, or a quasi-religious group, involved in controversial scientific experiments such as advanced genetic engineering to create 'supersoldiers' with enhanced strength and endurance. There might be tests involving mind control, telepathy, telekinesis and other psychic abilities, the creation of human-animal or human-alien hybrids, cloning, the development of chemical or viral 'weapons', unheard-of advances in virtual reality, robotic or cyber-technology, or the establishment of secretive first contact with previously undiscovered lifeforms. Characters might be federal agents with a taste for the bizarre (sound familiar?) or investigative reporters with hazardous curiosity, but they could just as easily be innocent civilians – office clerks, computer programmers, postal workers, games designers – who just happen to have the misfortune to stumble upon a sequence of events that will shake the foundations of their lives. The contemporary or near-future setting which this sort of campaign demands has the advantage of its subject matter being familiar to us all, and the potential threat is that much more credible and immediate. If you know your players well enough you might even focus on their personal fears. If you have players who find the thought of secret service agents using alien technology to control the minds of the populace particularly disturbing, then why not use that as the basis of your campaign?

> "Be bold, even if it means the minions of darkness wiping out a chunk of the population."

But the prospect of playing in such an intense and psychological campaign might not appeal to you. If you would rather play more of an action adventure in the James Bond mode, in which wealthy billionaires plot to ransom the world so they can become multi-billionaires, then there's no reason why that too can't provide the basis for an engrossing campaign. Madness, or at the very least extreme eccentricity, should be the watchwords for your conspirators in this type of campaign. And larger-than-life villains require

Illustrations ©arcane by Lee Carter

heroes of similar stature. Ideally suited to the adventure style are spies, secret agents and millionaire adventurers with nothing better to do with their time than save the world. There's certainly plenty of inspiration available – just watch any Bond movie, or read books by the likes of Tom Clancy, Clive Cussler and Robert Ludlum.

And if you want to take the idea of a conspiracy to its furthest extreme, either because you don't have the time to set up a protracted campaign yourself or simply because you want to play it for laughs, you should pay a visit to *Paranoia's* Alpha Complex, where everybody really is out to get everybody else, the average character has a life expectancy calculated in minutes, and the Computer is most definitely your friend.

But no matter what style you decide suits you best, any good conspiracy campaign must contain certain key elements. First, it must have the durability of a campaign, because a single adventure won't allow you the space to develop the required atmosphere, to build up the tension and gradually reveal the true scope of the plot the characters have got themselves involved in. Second, the players must be drawn into the conspiracy in such a way that they don't realise the nature and extent of what they've stumbled upon, until it's too late. Third, the conspiracy must be utterly believable, in terms of the internal logic of the gameworld, requiring a defined agenda as well as the resources and personnel needed to have a genuine chance of succeeding in its dastardly scheme. We shall be taking a look at each of these elements, as well as suggesting some further ways to prey on that common sense of paranoia which seems to affect all seasoned gamers (at least, it seems to affect the ones who play my games – although I can't for the life of me think why).

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

The hardest part of any adventure is coming up with a credible reason for involving the player characters, without resorting to clichéd tavern meetings or midnight calls from a man named Johnson. If you're planning on developing a world-threatening conspiracy, you need to start small. The characters' first insight into the workings of the organisation behind the conspiracy should provide enough information to intrigue them, give them a sense that there is more to this adventure than meets the eye, but nothing more. The last thing you want to do is have the players completely unravel the plot while it's still in its infancy.

If you don't have characters who are government agents, investigators or journalists, any one of whom could reasonably be investigating a strange occurrence such as an unexplained murder, a kidnapping, or the sighting of unidentified aircraft, then you might like to involve one or more of the characters directly, either by having one of the victims be a member of a character's family, or have a character as a witness, albeit one who saw very little. Take great care over your trigger event, because this is the hook you use to draw the players in. It needs to be shocking and immediate, dynamic enough to grab the players' attention, yet on the surface appear to have a relatively mundane and straightforward explanation. At the same time it should possess a certain enigmatic quality, enabling the gradual realisation of something deeper, something hidden and unexplained, something that requires further investigation.

Typically, the dramatic incident that first attracts the characters' attention might be a crime or apparent crime, such as the seemingly motiveless murder of a prominent scientist working on an AIDS vaccine, a fire at an old

historical models

Roswell 1947

On July 4th 1947, so the story goes, a UFO crashed near the town of Roswell, New Mexico, killing the four alien occupants. The incident was reported to the local sheriff, who in turn informed the nearby US Airbase. On 8th July, a press release confirmed that the vehicle was a 'flying saucer'. It was contradicted the following day, the UFO being identified as a weather balloon, and has been denied ever since.

Rumours and speculation surrounding this most famous of alleged cover-ups abound, and this single incident could be used as the springboard for a variety of different campaigns depending on how you want to explain the events of July 1947. For example, did one of the pilots survive the crash, and if so what happened to them? Are these the same aliens responsible for the countless reported abductions? Is there an Area 51 in the Nevada desert, where the advanced alien technology is studied and used to develop, among other things, stealth aircraft and secret moon mission craft?

A few of these possibilities are explored in *Independence Day*, the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* episode called 'Little Green Men', and a popular American series about the FBI.

The Kennedy Assassination

Shot and killed in Dallas, Texas on 22nd November 1963. His alleged assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was killed shortly after by Jack Ruby. The mystery surrounding the 35th president's death and alleged CIA involvement can provide a rich source of inspiration for referees. An event of historic significance such as this could be the goal of a conspiratorial group, or merely a necessary step towards the ultimate aim; it could even be an aberration, a rogue member driven over the edge who jeopardises the scheme and in doing so provides a clue.

For ideas on how to develop campaigns based on the assassination of a political figure, there is of course Oliver Stone's *JFK*, and also the series of supplements for *Shadowrun* detailing the election of 2057, in particular the death of President Dunkelzahn.

Bermuda Triangle

An area of the Atlantic bounded by Florida, Bermuda and Puerto Rico, which has been the site of innumerable disappearances of ships and aircraft. It was named in 1945, after six US Navy planes were lost on December 5th, on a sunny day in good flying conditions, just as the majority of disappearances have occurred in fine weather or close to port and often following radio communication. Many explanations have been suggested to explain the lack of debris, strange electrical surges and interference with radio messages.

In your campaign, an area such as the Bermuda Triangle could house a secret government installation, the research centre of an anarchist society, or even a colony of aliens whose motives could be anything from peaceful, anonymous existence to eventual invasion.

Secret Societies

There have been numerous enigmatic organisations throughout history, whose influence and longevity vary, but whose activities could be developed to form the basis of an historical or modern-day conspiracy. Among the more infamous are the Rosicrucians, or the Order of the Rose-Croix, who claim to date back to 1489BC and thus be the oldest secret society in the western world; the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a short-lived but influential occult order whose membership included WB Yeats and Aleister Crowley; the Order of the Knights Templar, originally the militant arm of the church during the Crusades but later brought down amid accusations of sorcery and devil-worship; the Order of Illuminati, and the Freemasons.

The secrecy of these organisations, the rituals with which they are associated, often involving suggestions of magic, the wealth and fame of members, and a desire for political and religious reform, make any of these groups ideal adversaries for investigative PCs.

For further information on these and other secret groups from history, see the *Nephilim* supplement *Secret Societies* and *Golden Dawn* for *Call of Cthulhu*.

warehouse, or the unexplained disappearance of an outspoken politician. But although it seems mysterious to begin with, evidence soon surfaces which appears to explain the case to everyone's satisfaction. Traces of crack cocaine point to an addict looking to feed his or her habit, the charred remains of a vagrant and the presence of cigar stubs suggests the fire was started accidentally, and the politician reappears a few days later looking better than he has in months. But then someone notices a few cracks appearing in these apparently open and shut cases. Ballistic reports indicate that the bullets which killed the scientist were fired from a silenced gun, and come to mention it, didn't the three wounds seem a little too precise for a crazed drug addict? Dig a little deeper and you might find that your scientist has been working very long hours of late, but his work on the vaccine has hardly progressed at all. A closer examination of the warehouse might reveal unusual scrape marks on the floor, leading to the discovery of a secret meeting room hidden under the warehouse. It's abandoned now, but for how long? And as for our politician, he doesn't appear so outspoken these days, in fact one might even suggest he seems like a new man...

LAST RESORT
And if you're still running low on inspiration, if you're absolutely desperate for ideas, then you can always resort to *The X-Files*. But bear this in mind – your players have probably seen those episodes too.

These are just a few potential starting points for your campaign, based on the simple premise that things are never quite as simple as they may at first appear. To add an extra touch of personal involvement, the scientist might be an old colleague or tutor of one of the characters, the dead vagrant could turn out to be a relative who had hit upon dreadfully hard times, while the politician's wife might be an old friend, or possibly even a lover. By tying the trigger event to a particular character, you should not only be guaranteed to stimulate the players' interest, but they will also have a vested concern in seeing the campaign out to its conclusion.

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN
It's always good to have a definite end to any campaign based on a conspiracy theory, otherwise the characters will get frustrated by the fact that they never arrive at the 'truth', whatever it may be.

This is not the sort of campaign where you can just lead them along, rolling random encounters and letting NPC associates do all the hard work. The players have to really want to become involved, be keen to get to the bottom of the mystery you've put before them, and piece together the jigsaw of your conspiracy for themselves, because it's only when you've got their full attention and commitment that you can begin to feel the creeping paranoia, the genuine fear and bewilderment that can make this sort of campaign special.

WHO RUNS THIS SHOW THEN?

ATMOSPHERE
Creating a suitably 'dark' atmosphere for any horror-style game is extremely hard. However, Paul White offers advice in his feature, Tales of Terror, in **arcane** 7.

But before you can even begin to run a campaign based on intrigue, conspiracy and paranoia, you need to establish a credible background. Assuming you've settled on a suitable game system and style, the next thing to do is set up a challenging foe, an organisation so elusive, insidious and ruthlessly determined to achieve its goals that it will stop at nothing to ensure success. We're not talking about a group of college students planning a protest march here. This is the real thing. In order to have sufficient impact on your campaign, the conspiracy must have the potential to radically alter it, and in order to gain the players' full commitment to stopping it, they must have plenty to lose if it succeeds. It must also stand a very good chance of succeeding.

This style of campaign requires planning. To begin with, you have to decide on the nature of the organisation whose ambitions will form the basis of the campaign. What you need is an organisation that is powerful enough to secretly manipulate the lives of ordinary people, but has a thirst for greater influence and the resources at its disposal to enable it to achieve that ambition.

In a modern setting, secret services or covert branches of government departments such as the CIA, KGB or part of the military would have access to the sort of information, funds and the resources to make formidable opponents. The near future provides the referee with scheming megacorporations, making any cyberpunk setting ideal, while Ben Elton's *Stark* and *Gridlock* illustrate the power of international corporations to exert considerable influence on our daily lives even now. There have been secret societies and cults with hidden agendas throughout history, and the realities of sorcery and demons in a fantasy or horror campaign such as *Warhammer, Call of Cthulhu* or the *World of Darkness* would make them even more dangerous.

Depending on the nature of your campaign, different types of organisations could be pre-eminent. In a world with a powerful church, characters such as Cardinal Richelieu or Primate Annias from David Eddings' *Elenium* have the power and personality to be admirable foes, their reputation and authority effectively placing them beyond the accusations of lowly individuals such as the PCs. Criminal masterminds such as Moriarty, or Marvel Comics' Kingpin, can similarly use their undoubted influence and wealth to undermine society's fragile foundations, while the modern obsession with all things extraterrestrial could be vindicated if the world was infiltrated by shape-changing or mind-controlling alien invaders such as Robert Heinlein's Puppet Masters or the infamous Body Snatchers.

As you can see, a conspiracy can take many forms, though perhaps the most intriguing, and certainly the most disturbing, is that which infiltrates the dominant political power directly. A senior politician who is also a member of an anarchist cult, or a leading corporate boss who manipulates members of the government and thus has effective control over certain policies. Try to avoid the temptation of infesting your campaign with too many conspiracies, though. It's one thing to have the players believing that everyone is against them, that they have enemies round every corner and in every government department, but that needn't necessarily be true. And even if it is, those people should be working towards the same ends, with the same leaders, that is unless you want your campaign to descend into farce à la *Paranoia*, where everyone really is a member of a conspiracy and out to shanghai everyone else.

> "Fire-bomb the players' homes, blow up their cars... Let them know how serious you are."

Although your conspiracy should initially appear faceless to the clueless players, you should give some thought to the important individuals who form the upper echelons of the organisation, and the people who work for them. From the wealthy benefactor through the corrupt politician to the expendable lackey, everyone will have their own reasons for being a part of the conspiracy, whether it be greed, blind ambition, ideological conviction or fear. Divide your conspirators into two groups: those the players are hoping to bring down, and those they will hopefully stymie, but whose faces they'll never get to see. That way the players have opponents they will come to know and hate, people they can look forward to defeating, while at the same time the scale of the conspiracy will remain a mystery.

CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

Though their work will undoubtedly involve a vast range of different activities, each organisation is motivated by one primary agenda, the force that drives them to act contrary to the prevailing ideals of their world. Again the nature and membership of the organisation, and the style of campaign you are running, will dictate to some extent the sort of objectives your villains are striving for, but the following are a few suggested goals sought by conspirators.

- **The acquisition of wealth,** whether it be for the personal benefit of a select group of individuals or the treasury of an entire nation, is perhaps the most basic form of ambition. These people have no desire to change the world for good or bad, beyond improving their own status. Of course, in a world where money equals power, that wealth would undoubtedly open new doors for the lucky winners, and they may well try to disguise the true nature of their primitive ambition by dressing it up in some political or theological ideology, but all these conspirators are after a fat load of cash.

- **Increased political power,** perhaps with the ultimate aim of world domination, is the popular choice, while merely attempting to safeguard or consolidate a political position may be sufficient for the less ambitious. These people probably believe with all sincerity that their idea of a perfect society should be adopted throughout the world,

DEEP SPACE ALIENS

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine's greatest adversaries are the Founders of the Dominion, metamorphic liquid-form aliens who control a vast galactic empire. Their ability to adopt any shape or form, and their abiding hatred of us 'solids', creates understandable paranoia whenever anything bad happens, and enables them to manipulate their enemies with great subtlety. This is graphically illustrated in episodes such as 'Homefront' and 'Paradise Lost' from season four.

The truth is out there

As with most campaign styles, a conspiracy can shake the foundations of any game you want it to. But it works best in those settings with a strong political background, where the potential for intrigue and corruption are greatest. Here are a few games which come highly recommended for the depth and fascination of their backgrounds.

Castle Falkenstein

Swashbuckling adventures in an alternate Victorian New Europa of High Magick and steampunk technology, the well thought-out history cleverly interweaves historical fact and fiction, providing endless possibilities for developing adventures of intrigue and espionage. Ideally suited to a more James Bond/secret agent style of campaign, with players taking the role of agents of King Ludwig of Bayern, defending the small nation's interests against rival operatives of the Prussian von Bismarck, the World Crime League, Karl Marx's Anarchist Brotherhood, or the malevolent faeries of the Unseeli court.

Conspiracy X

Though it borrows ideas unashamedly from a certain cult television series, this game offers a great deal that is original and is positively bursting with scenario ideas. Its contemporary setting not only makes inspiration easy to come by – from fictional or real-life sources – but it also makes the impact of its themes more immediate and effective. As members of Aegis, a secret government department dedicated to protecting mankind from all manner of paranormal and extraterrestrial threats, players have their hands full combating alien Greys, Atlanteans and Saurials, and agents of the sinister Black Book. In the world of *Conspiracy X*, every wild story is plausible, every nightmare is possible and every mystery is more than it seems.

Cybergeneration

This casts the players as teenage members of a gang infected with a disease known as the Carbon Plague, and genetically altered as a result, who are on the run from corporate authorities. Orientated more towards narrative-driven roleplaying than its combat-dominated parent system – *Cyberpunk 2020* – the concept of the little guys wronged but fighting back provides a fertile setting for a campaign based on governmental conspiracy.

Don't Look Back

Another modern-day game where terror lurks behind every corner, *Don't Look Back* can be played in a variety of styles from chilling horror, through complex mystery, to camp B-movie, but it is perhaps best suited to a conspiracy style of game, with the players once again taking the roles of federal agents. With its straightforward system and the flexibility of its background, *DLB* is perfectly suited to inexperienced as well as veteran players.

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay

Characters struggle to defend The Empire against the machinations of chaos cultists seeking anything from war and bloodshed to promiscuity and the overthrow of society. The setting is late medieval/Renaissance, one of the most engaging and well-realised fantasy worlds around – a down-and-dirty style of fantasy where the relative weakness of the PCs makes the threat of chaos that much more compelling. The entire *Enemy Within* campaign pits the characters against the chaos menace, but of particular interest to referees running conspiracy-style campaigns is *Power Behind the Throne*. A difficult but ultimately rewarding adventure, with a plethora of fascinating characters and an open, flexible storyline which relies heavily on the players' actions, it pits our heroes against a dangerous cultist leader firmly ensconced in a high-ranking position of power.

to the obvious benefit of all concerned. Whether they be capitalist, communist, federalist, utopian, or members of a fundamentalist religious sect, these dangerous groups are driven by a faith in their cause that makes them ruthless and often suicidal in their dedication. They are prepared to make any sacrifices to achieve their goals, and will not hesitate to eliminate any obstacles that hinder the progress of the master plan.

● **Causing governmental collapse and anarchy** is a common aim of cultists serving entities of chaos and other paranormal forces. International crime lords might also benefit from a 'relaxation' of law enforcement and heady slide towards societal breakdown, while subversive alien invaders might tend to aim for outright world conquering as a long-term goal, or if they lack the patience they may simply be laying plans for the wholesale destruction of the planet.

Not all of these motivations need be entirely malevolent, though due to the secretive nature of the organisations behind them, and the often extreme measures taken to ensure their success, they might appear so. Not all conspirators are inherently evil, and many will genuinely believe in the validity of their dream to create a worldwide communist society, or that the advancements in genetic engineering they are able to make will ultimately benefit the whole of mankind. The point to bear in mind is that most members of these secret organisations will seem to be normal people and not megalomanical madmen. The difference is that to them the end always justifies the means, and they have the power and potential to turn their visions into reality.

YOU KNOW FAR TOO MUCH

In order to have a significant impact on your campaign world, your secret society will need to have a large membership drawn from all quarters of society. Naturally, the majority of these members will have only the most basic understanding of the cause for which they fight, and little or no idea as to the many ways in which the society goes about achieving its goals. Some will be active agents, the sort of villainous thugs, hitmen and spies that the PCs will face directly, while many will be sympathetic 'sleepers', patiently going about their lives, awaiting the day when they can make their contribution to the cause.

Given only as much information as they need to perform their assigned duties, these agents are the members of the conspiracy that the PCs are likely to run into in the early stages of the campaign, and could provide a number of useful clues or frustrating red herrings. These are the ready-made scapegoats, the ones who'll have to face the music should something go wrong. They are also the ones who do the organisation's dirty work.

These are the activities that the characters will find themselves investigating, or perhaps becoming the target of. By following up on clues from earlier incidents, information supplied by informants, and educated guesswork, they will gradually piece together enough information to uncover another layer of the plot. All the while they will be trying to get to the bottom of the mystery, yet at each turn they will meet fresh obstacles – every answer yields a dozen questions, and the risks increase exponentially the further they delve.

Control of information is vital, and the conspiracy will need contacts in the media if it is to have any chance of succeeding. Stubborn investigators will need putting off the scent, a mistake could require covering up, and it may even become necessary to sacrifice an inconsequential member in order to protect the identity of someone more important. Any attempt to manipulate the media could attract the characters' attention and provide valuable clues, if they can avoid the minefield of misinformation placed in their way. You can use blunders and obvious cover-ups to provide the players with help if they need it, such as an obviously fraudulent document left at a crime scene, or a reliable witness missed by a complacent assassin.

From time to time the organisation might need additional funds, weapons or other vital equipment. If your contacts can't provide for your needs, you'll have to despatch some highly-trained operatives to get the goods for you, making sure the theft can't be connected to the upper levels of the conspiracy. Once again, the characters can find valuable clues at the scene.

> "Put the players in genuine fear for their characters' lives."

But sooner or later someone is going to find out about your plans, and you have to make sure that he or she can't do any lasting damage. You may just want to keep this person quiet for now, perhaps by use of blackmail. After all, everyone has a few skeletons in the closet, and it's a useful way of acquiring extra funds. But blackmail is a risky business, so you may resort to kidnapping. Perhaps you're short of specimens to experiment on, or need a few extra body parts. If you have the capability, you could replace your victim with a doppelgänger, particularly useful if he or she is an important senator or rival corporate boss.

Alternatively, you could indulge yourself in a spot of memory adjustment or removal, if you have the technology. It's clean, reliable and the poor sap won't even know he's being used until it's too late. You might even abduct a character, tinker with his mind a little, then return him to his friends apparently none the worse. That is, until they begin to realise that certain events are missing from his memory, that skills he's possessed for years have deserted him, and that whenever someone says 'messerschmidt' he goes on an uncontrollable killing frenzy.

All sound a bit too convoluted? Then just eliminate the threat altogether. If the engineer won't build you the super-weapon you need, make him take a short walk off a tall building. If that reporter persists in interfering, let her try a concrete overcoat for size. If they happen to be friends of the characters, even better. And don't just limit the use of deadly force to unfortunate NPCs. Put the players in genuine fear for their

CONSPIRACY AT THE FLICKS

A large number of films, particularly science fiction, involve conspiratorial themes. Some you might find useful include the *Alien* trilogy, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Roswell*, *Strange Days*, *The Net* and *Total Recall*.

MEN IN BLACK

Next year the spoof film *Men In Black* is being released across the globe. It's about a couple of secret agents who have to deal with a rampaging alien terrorist. West End Games is releasing an RPG based on the movie.

characters' lives. Have them race down unlit alleyways pursued by highly-trained assassins whose work they are all too familiar with. Firebomb their homes, blow up their cars – "No, not my BMW!" – kill their friends and torture their goldfish. Let them know how serious you are. It's messy, but dead men tell no tales. Just make sure that nothing can be traced back to you.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the conspiracy is how much of it you will reveal to the players, and at what stages each new facet will become apparent. The pace at which you allow the campaign to develop will determine the levels of tension you will be able to sustain. By setting intermediate goals, enabling the players to expose new levels of the conspiracy, thwarting the ultimate plan but not defeating it entirely, you provide them with the element of success that they crave, while retaining enough surprises to keep them guessing for a while yet. Take your foot off the pedal every now and then, and allow the players a chance to relax with a diverting little side-adventure – nothing too dangerous. A diversion can create a wonderful feeling of security and self-congratulation that is just dying to be exploited by a devious referee, particularly after they've just unearthed someone who they believe is central to the conspiracy, but who in reality is little more than a middle-man.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

Your players are really going to struggle to topple a global conspiracy all on their own. Particularly at the start, they won't have the faintest idea what's going on, and the more they discover, the more they'll realise just how little they really know. It can become overwhelming, and the players might well want to give up if they feel they're getting nowhere, and that no matter what they do things are out of their control.

So, from time to time they're going to need a little help, someone on the inside who can supply vital information, point them in the right direction, or correct them when they go wrong. But that help is limited. The contact needs to protect his own identity, otherwise risks being discovered. Another thing to bear in mind is that, as with everything else in a conspiracy campaign, even apparent friends can't be trusted entirely.

Why is this person offering his help? How did he make contact in the first place, and how did he prove he could be trusted? What does he hope to gain from aiding the characters, if anything? He risks his life every time he makes contact, but how far is he prepared to go? He almost certainly has his own agenda, but what could it be? He could in fact be working for the other side all along, feeding the PCs misleading information. Anything is possible.

You could have a regular informant, someone the players come to rely on, right up to the moment when he gets found out and ends up as just another statistic. There might also be any number of anonymous helpers coming forward with what they claim is vital information, no doubt retrieved at great personal risk. But how reliable are they, and how do you know they haven't been followed? Will they look to the characters for protection in return for their information, or will a holdall full of used notes suffice? For players, the important question to ask is: why is everyone so keen to help you out? And, of course, there is that definitive piece of advice for every paranoid investigator – trust no-one.

LOOSE ENDS

There will come a time when your players feel they have uncovered enough information to bring down your carefully-constructed conspiracy. But before you let them ruin all your hard work, give some serious thought as to just how much of a conclusion you want the campaign to reach. While a tying-up of all available loose ends at the climax of a campaign can be very satisfying for players, it leaves a hollow feeling for the humble referee. You will have put in a lot of work designing a cunning scheme with which to challenge the players, and although deep down you always knew you would lose in the end, you probably still yearn for even the tiniest of pyrrhic victories.

Fortunately, logic is on your side. Think about it – what are the chances that every significant member of a powerful syndicate of corporate or governmental figures will fall to the same sword stroke? Pretty unlikely, I would say. How reasonable is it to assume that there are still a number of powerful individuals out there whose interests have been severely harmed by the characters' actions, and who still have plenty of followers dedicated to their cause? It's a fair bet. Some of these peripheral members will be mopped up in the aftermath, as the players wrap up remaining clues and follow up on outstanding leads, but no matter how thorough they are, there will always be someone out there they know nothing about, but who knows about them all too well. If they stop and think about it for a moment, they may even realise that their victory is just a touch too good to be true. But then again, maybe they won't.

So let the players have their moment of glory, they probably deserve it. But take some solace from the thought that there are still a few loose ends unaccounted for, and that your conspiracy may just rise again from the ashes for another bite at world domination. They'll be back. And guess who'll be top of their hit list?

Next Month

We're giving away (well, that's not strictly true, but, anyway...) an entire roleplaying game. Yep, that's right, the somewhat horrific *Puppetland* game by Mr John Tynes will be gracing the pages of arcane 16, providing he doesn't change his mind at the last minute...

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ISSUE 10 ON SALE NOW!

UP THE

Tired of two-dimensional worlds? Fed up of useless maps which tell you that there are elves here, treasure there and dwarves in the mountains? ***Gideon Kibblewhite*** *searches his back yard for some imaginative alternatives.*

Many people try creating their own world for a campaign setting at one stage or another – it's great fun and the logical thing to attempt, eventually. As any of you who read our 'Worldbuilder' series (**arcane** 1-5) will know, the key is to think of something original, and one source of inspiration is, literally, in your back garden (or in someone else's if you haven't got one).

"What?" you cry. "What is he talking about?" Well, think about it... Remember when you were young? In those days your garden, the playground, the woods and the park (delete as appropriate if you had a deprived childhood) were part of a different world. Your cars, Action Man and Barbie dolls could all be transported by a whim of your imagination to a different plane of existence where the drive became a scorching desert, the lawn a sea of grass that went on forever, and the stone wall an impossibly high cliff which your British Eighth Army soldiers had to attempt to scale.

Roleplaying is all about using your imagination, but the advancing years can stilt this all too quickly. So, take a page from the dim and distant chapters of your youth and go out into your garden. Who knows what you may find there – a forest perhaps, a country ravaged by war and famine, or maybe an alien planet.

PLAYING WITH PLASTIC

Of course, it would be silly to suggest that you overlay your entire garden with clear plastic, marked out with hexes. So, er, we won't. Even though it might be some fun. Sort of.

The pond

There's something strange about a shaded tree or a moonlit pond, isn't there? Or even a green and stagnant pond slowly evaporating in the summer sun. A few moments spent staring into the darkling water leaves you completely mesmerised. Weird shapes move on the surface and in the depths. Your reflection watches you, its forehead rippling in a mystical frown. Another, darker universe seems to lie just beyond it. You could be staring at so many things: the gateway to a different dimension, an eye, an extinct volcano, or maybe an inland sea.

Wells, ponds and the like are often used as atmospheric devices in stories, especially when you can't quite make out the bottom. Where does it lead to? How deep does it go? And if you could go down there (that is, if you were brave enough) – to some hell-hole or catacomb – what might come up?

The drive

A desert, perhaps. A huge, boulder-strewn desert, freezing in winter and parched in summer. Seasonal lakes might form there, huge stones rearing like icebergs in their waters.

Looking at the garden from a different perspective, it could be just that – a garden. But what if it was a wizard's garden? Wizards, of course, rarely like to be disturbed without good reason. Only true heroes get to see them, and that means getting past all the traps laid cunningly in their innocuous-looking domain.

What hidden dangers could a drive hold? A hidden pit of scorpions, perhaps. Or maybe the drive is just an illusion, the house remaining a mile away no matter how far you walk. Or what if certain areas of gravel are razor sharp and tipped with poison – slow working poison. Assuming you get by all the other traps, puzzles and creatures, and make it to the front door, your host could decide at leisure whether or not it's worth bothering to give you the antidote.

The patio

The patio forms an intricate pattern of cracks and crevices. If you were smaller than an ant, what would it look like then? Miles of strange terrain consisting of great, flat slabs of rock, a labyrinth of dark pathways running between them. Strange shrubs and huge beds of moss guarding your way. Small caves and tunnels lead off the pathway, from which noises can be heard. It's dark by day and even darker by night. Who knows who or what might haunt this strange world, or how you get out of it alive...

illustration © arcane by Dix

GARDEN PATH

the gaming magazine arcane

CAMPAIGN IDEAS

The bird table

It could be a *Star Wars*-type cloud city, floating over some world. Its many landing platforms and buildings lighting up the night sky, making the savages who live below skulk in fear in their caves. On the other hand, it could be a complex and beautiful tower carved by an ancient civilisation from a massive tree.

However, the bird table could take on a more sinister aspect. It could be the *dreaded* Bird Table – the place where heroic adventurers, branded witches and infidels are pegged out to be devoured alive by huge and savage rocs. (Not a pleasant end – have you *seen* what blackbirds do to worms?) You can imagine the parting words of the evil high priest: "Enough! Guards, take them to the Bird Table!"

The hedge

Hedges form mazes and barriers, their thorns ripping through the sturdiest of clothes. They also contain nests and hiding places. Spiders, birds and other animals you never knew existed live in hedges, and when the hedges are gone what mysteries will have been consigned to oblivion?

From ground level, a hedge appears like a thick forest whose dry, leaf-covered floor is protected by an impenetrable canopy. You could walk for miles in such a wood and never see the light of day. Oddly silent, though not peaceful, the sounds you make – your footfalls and the noise you make brushing through the undergrowth – seem to be absorbed by the forest. Your desperate cries are swallowed without any echo. With no sun to act as a guide, you can very quickly become lost – prey for all manner of elves and goblins.

The tree at the bottom of the garden

The tree seems to have a life of its own, and a patient watchfulness of unknown intent. Its branches form wiry limbs, its bowl an ancient face. By day it seems a friendly soul – benign, at least – but by night it's something else. The wind has sculpted and withered it, almost as if the tree has flung out its arms in some wild dance and then frozen.

This ancient sycamore is familiar to many – to the rook that roosts in it, to the villagers who dance around it, hand-in-hand by night, to the creatures who come and go unseen through the fox hole at its base, and to the grey figure who can sometimes be seen standing by it, staring at you.

The house

This could be a fold-up house, like those invented by Jack Vance in *Lyonesse*. Or it could be bigger on the inside than the outside, like the TARDIS.

On the other hand, it might not be a house at all. If you were an ant, for instance, what would it look like then? A huge monolith jutting into the sky, towering even over the mountains (the wall)? An enormous face, perhaps, carved into a cliff. Or a massive tomb – the resting place of some king.

The house could act as a temple in a jungle clearing – the kind of temple which always holds treasure untold and trouble unbargained for. Or it could just be the outstretched finger of some ancient statue buried beneath your feet.

HONEY, I SHRUNK THE PCS

We promise you, the inspiration for this feature did not come from watching that cheesy American film where the children get shrunk to the size of mice and have to get back to the house through the garden. That really was plain silly.

The world

All of these suggestions are campaign ideas to help ignite your imagination. There were no doubt other aspects of childhood life which you twisted with your imagination to form a world or scenario of your own. Such fantasies were often formed out of fear and desire – the most powerful of emotions. So, why waste them? Why stop now just because your spots have faded and you've realised that perhaps it was a good thing they didn't bring back *Blake 7* after all?

You may have passed the 'what if everything was made out of chocolate?' stage, but don't let that stunt your ideas. For those referees and games players who are imaginative enough the world really can be your oyster.

Why do the dirty...

...work yourself when you can pay somebody else to do it for you? Such is the ethic of the crime boss, an individual who has taken crime and turned it into a business. The Mafia, the triad, a hundred and one drug-dealing gangs and gun-running organisations across the globe – organised crime is a big money-maker, and mucky as it may be, these types of gangs are going to be operating in your campaigns.

Maybe your characters haven't come across them yet; maybe the actions of the adventuring party or crime-busting collaboration haven't yet been of sufficient impact to affect the workings of an established gang, group or organisation that specialises in criminal activity. But you can rest assured – sooner or later the characters who are stumbling through your campaign, oblivious to the sinister goings-on that are currently hidden from them, bubbling away beneath the surface of the fantastical town they dwell in, or operating under cover of legitimate business in the interstellar corporate markets, are going to be awoken to the fact that crime is rife. And they're going to have to get involved. You should ensure that this is so.

The scenario possibilities which are presented by the introduction of organised crime gangs into your campaign are immense. There are dozens of potential plot lines to be exploited, no matter what type of game you play, or what genre it comes from. If there's one thing that's pretty well universal across all roleplaying gameworlds, it's the amount of crime that's going on.

A HIGH CLASS OF CRIMINAL

Organised crime is a significant step up from a few hoodlums who like to mug old women and hold up off-licenses. When you're talking about organised crime gangs, you're talking about people who are intelligent (at least in the higher echelons of the organisation), rational, powerful and probably on friendly terms with the politicians and officials of the land. They will have legitimate business interests through which they launder the money they accrue through their criminal activities.

This is not always the case. Some of the films suggested as reference (see page 34) feature drug-gang crime in the major American cities. In most cases these gangs, especially those that operate at a street level, don't operate behind the facade of legitimate business, or have to bribe officials in order to continue their efforts; rather, their strength and the 'fear factor' within the areas in which they operate keeps them in business. However, for the purposes of your campaign world, when you come to building a gang with which your party of adventurers are going to have contact, it's probably best to layer the gang sufficiently, and that means making it big, powerful and operating beneath a veneer of perceived legitimacy.

What is meant by layering a gang? All gangs operate on a hierarchical basis – there's the boss, who'll have a right-hand-man and some close advisors; there'll be a number of sub-bosses, probably looking after different elements of the organisation's 'business'; there'll be some heavies, brutes with some experience in making life pretty miserable for other people; and there'll be the rank-and-file members, the chimps who are ordered to do the majority of the gang's dirty work, and take most of the risks where getting caught and imprisoned is on the cards.

When introducing a gang into a campaign, it should be the rank-and-file that the characters have initial contact with, especially if they're of low level or just starting out in their adventuring career. You don't want to shoot off your big guns early, so, as with all scenarios and campaigns that are based on a theme, have the characters become aware of the actions of the small fry, and then slowly let them know that these local thugs and hoodlums are but pawns in a far larger game. But before we launch into what the gangs get up to, let's first look at how gangs are constructed, and how the hierarchy works.

> "If there's one thing that's universal across all roleplaying gameworlds it's the amount of crime that's going on."

The Boss Generally, there'll be but one boss in a gang, unless it's a really large one where there are a number of related bosses (such is the case with some of the Mafia organisations). He or she will be well removed from the day-to-day, bread and butter business of the gang; numbers rackets, street peddling, protection arrangements... All of that sort of messy business is far beneath the boss, or indeed, his deputies. No, the boss will be involved in making purchase agreements of major consignments of merchandise, negotiating with other gang bosses over territory, and generally watching his back.

The deputies Whether you call them right-hand-men, sub-bosses or anything else, the trusted advisors and close friends of the boss, who are involved in the running and the control of the organisation, are basically deputies. And that means they should each be able to instantly step in and fill the big man's shoes should he be on the receiving end of a large calibre bullet. These people may perform any one of a number of functions within the gang – they may be crooked lawyers, chief hit-men, immediate family, accountants and so on.

The heavies Every gang's core members are those who perform the key jobs on the street, for the most part in an autonomous manner, while controlling bunches of mooks who are fit for nothing more than following orders and getting in the way of the artillery when the firefights break out. These 'heavies' will be experienced thugs who've proven themselves to be more able than the general rank-and-file. They'll pretty well always be armed (weapons appropriate to campaign background, of course, but firearms should feature in any modern-day game), and they'll command some considerable respect within the lower ranks of the organisation. Even the boss will probably know who these people are, and might make some effort to prevent them from being incapacitated.

The rank-and-file These are the expendable forces at the bottom of the pile – the guys who are told what to do and given a particularly hard time if they don't do it. If anyone's going to get hurt during an operation, then these are the guys who are gonna end up in hospital. These are the errand boys, the bare knuckle fighters who carry out the majority of the gang's dirty work, and the low-lives who are on the street corners selling the gang's dope to the desperate. Each and every one of them will be a nasty piece of work, fiercely loyal to the gang and to the heavy who commands it.

Report to base The proportions of these four types of gang member will vary hugely, though you should basically stick to the following formula. For every one boss, there will be two to four deputies. For every deputy there will be three or four heavies, and for each heavy around five rank-and-file. A typical gang would, therefore, have around 36 members.

Of course, the gang will also need a base of operations, and when you design a gang, this should be high on your list of priorities. After all, it's highly likely that at some point the player characters are going to end up there, and you'll want to have it mapped out as best you can (the Casino, as featured in this month's Encounter, would make an ideal gang base – see page 41). By working out what type of base your gang has, you can get a good feel for how the gang operates,

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Many novels have touched on the dealings of organised crime gangs, so it's hard to recommend a reading list, but do take a look at anything written by Mario Puzo – it's all superb.

GAMES, GAMES, GAMES...

As we've said, you can use organised crime in just about any game, but some of the most suited are: *Judge Dredd*, *Cyberpunk 2020*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Conspiracy X*, and *Traveller*.

THE BOYS

ORGANISED CRIME

WATCH THE BOX

As well as all those investigative journalistic efforts on TV (such as *The Cook Report)* and articles in the newspapers, there is a huge number of films which feature gangs of all types. Any one of these should provide you with some ideas for scenarios, but the more you can watch the better.

BLACK RAIN, for a Japanese triad-style organisation.
CASINO, the inspiration for this month's Encounter.
GOODFELLAS, with its drugs and sinister shallow graves.
HEAT, for the five-minute firefight.
JUICE, for gang loyalty issues.
MILLER'S CROSSING, for boss/deputy relationships and gang wars.
NEW JACK CITY, for yet more drugs.
ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA, again for gang loyalty.
SOUTH CENTRAL LA, to show you what it's like on the streets.
THE FRENCH CONNECTION 1&2, because they're cool.
THE GODFATHER parts I to III, enough said, really.
THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY, for a spot of British gang action.
THE UNTOUCHABLES, for the police's view on gangs.

what elements of organised crime it gets involved in, and how its members are likely to act.

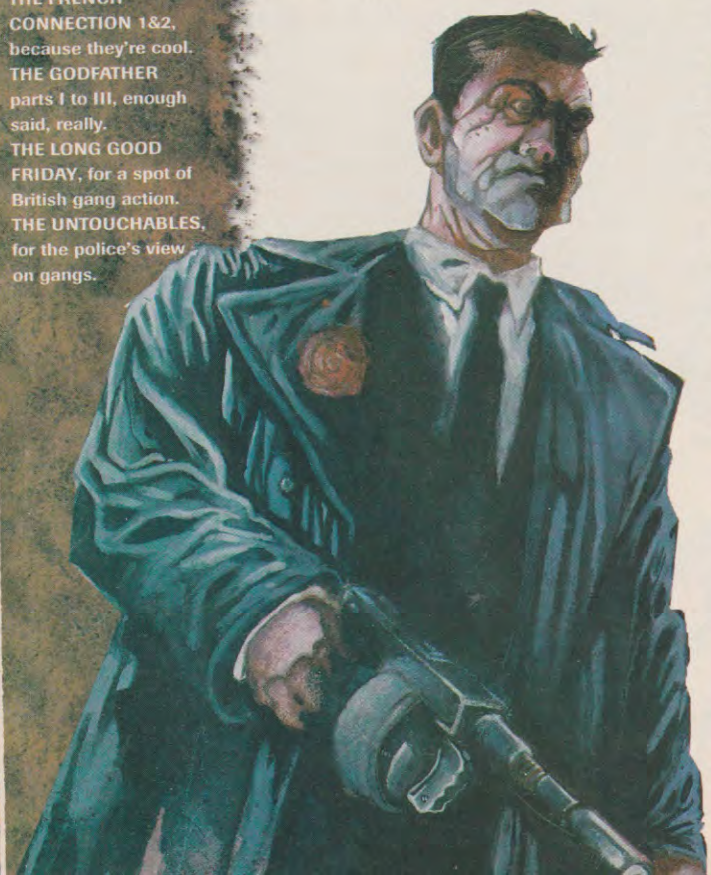
Let's take two examples. If your gang was indeed based in a casino, it's likely that the gang would be involved in money laundering and possibly illegal substances (whether they be drugs in a modern-day setting, or alcohol if your campaign is based in 1920s America). You would expect the gang members to be fairly courteous, to have a sense of responsibility towards their other gang fellows, and to have a code of honour that would never be broken.

On the other hand, imagine a gang which uses an abandoned warehouse as its base of operations. This gang is far more likely to be involved in smuggling – possibly drugs, maybe weapons or other illegal merchandise. It's more likely to be run by rough-and-ready types, and the gang members will probably be from a darker, more hostile background. There will be no code of honour as such, though the gang members would probably look after their own.

By choosing a location for your gang, you can instantly get a feel for what the members of the gang are like and the kind of trouble they're mixed up in. And there's nothing stopping you from being creative when coming up with your gang's base – how about a golf club, or an ocean liner, or even a humble terraced house with extensive basements?

There are all manner of illegal activities that gangs get involved in, many of which will touch the lives of the player characters somehow (thus giving you a chance to get them involved in a gang-based scenario). Here's a brief run-down of typical crimes perpetrated by larger gangs (though it's by no means exhaustive).

Blackmail Although blackmail is usually done on a personal level, it is something which gangs get involved with. A gang will go out of its way to set someone up so that they're in a compromising position, and then charge that person for not revealing the truth. Whether it be a powerful business man photographed with a prostitute, a local politician who's been taking backhanders, or celebrities who've had conversations recorded when they're saying something dreadful about the beneficiaries of some charity they work for, blackmail invariably works, and once the initial work's been done, it's a source of cash that's easy to maintain.



Drug dealing Because of the huge amounts of cash to be made, gangs frequently get involved in selling drugs, either on a street level, or, more likely, on a larger scale, where shipments are organised and the dope cut up and sold on to dealers. Drugs are a risky business for all gangs – because of the huge social stigma, the police are extremely hard on drug dealers, especially suppliers. Therefore, gang bosses will personally keep a distance between themselves and the drug-related element of their businesses, probably entrusting this particular line of work to one of their deputies.

Funny money Free money is a big lure to any gang, and it doesn't come much cheaper than making it yourself. Of course, forgery of bank notes is not easy, so you need to procure yourself an accomplished expert in this field. And then, after the production, you've got all of the associated problems of swapping the funny money for the real stuff. And that's where launderers come in, which is another line of business for larger gangs.

Hits For the most part, professional killings are freelanced out to able hitmen. It's rare for a gang to do its own dirty work when it comes to murders, although if money is tight, or there's a personal grudge involved, it has been known. And there will also be gangs that specialise in arranging hits, subcontracting out the work, or using one of their own 'in-house' killers.

Illegal lotteries The infamous 'numbers' games which the Mafia ran in the large American cities are great examples of illegal lotteries – a quick and easy way to make a fortune at the expense of the desperate. These work just like 'real' lotteries, only the tickets are sold by the rank-and-file on the street, and there isn't a penny paid in tax to the government. Of course, the prizes are always paid in full, otherwise the punters wouldn't pay to play.

Kidnapping Gangs rarely get involved in kidnapping, but when things are desperate, they've got the resources to do it, and to do it right. Personalities and political figures are generally a no-no, because the public profile of such people would gather too much media attention and make the kidnapping less likely to succeed. Rather, family members of wealthy businessmen are a far safer bet if it's money you're after. On the other hand, kidnapping the daughter of a judge who's presiding over a case which could result in one of the gang members going down might be a way of swinging the trial's outcome in your favour.

Loansharking When people are desperate enough for money, they'll borrow it from anyone, even if they know that they could end up dead if they don't meet the payments. And when it's gang money you're borrowing, those payments are huge, with interest rates that would make any bank manager green with envy.

Money laundering This is one of the most difficult operations for any organised crime gang to get involved in. It usually requires the help of a bank manager or director, and is therefore both costly and extremely risky. A legitimate business front is often required (a casino is ideal, because there you're actually giving out cash as well as accepting a large amount from the gamblers). But the rewards are high – you're making legitimate money out of ill-gotten gains, and that gives you something to fight your case with when the equivalent of the Inland Revenue or IRS start poking its nose in.

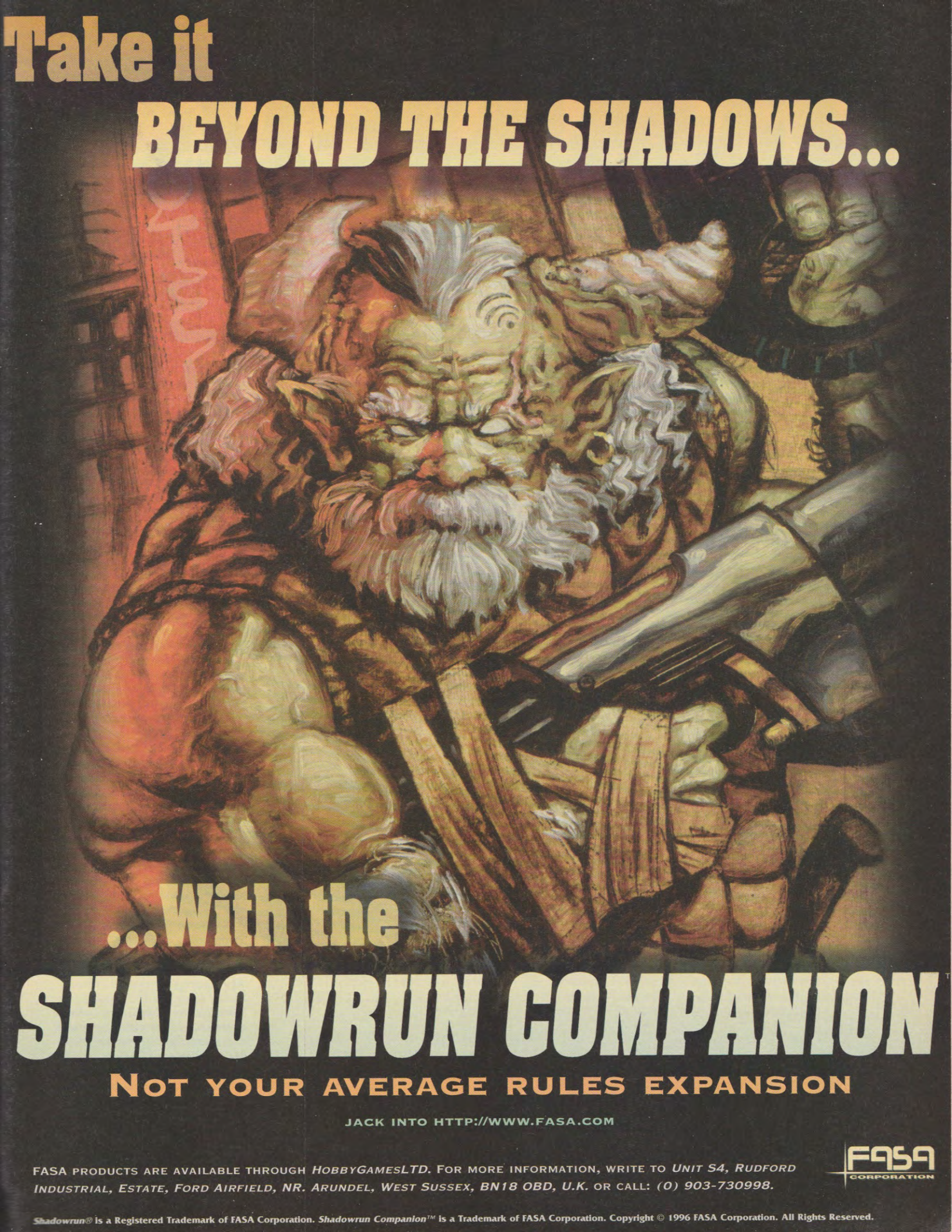
Protection schemes This is a simple one: walk into a shop and say, "We've heard that there is a gang operating in this area. We'll happily protect you and your premises for a mere £100 a month." If they cough up the money, then all well and good, and if they don't their shop gets firebombed and the protection figure goes up to £200 a month. Gangs have been at it for years and they're still at it today.

Robberies Whether on a grand scale (bank Securicor vans, trains and the like), or a minor scale (houses, office blocks and so on), robberies are rarely perpetrated by gangs. It's too easy to get caught, and unless you're going to take cash you've got volumes of gear which has to be shifted. Still, some gangs specialise in it (think *Reservoir Dogs* and *Heat),* and what's more do very well out of it.

Smuggling Smuggling operations take a great deal of organising, and the risks of getting caught are considerable. Therefore, it's usually the larger gangs that get involved in these kinds of operations, using their own boats and planes to avoid customs officials. Just about anything can be smuggled, though drugs, gems and gold are the most lucrative.

Vehicle crime The 'ringing' of cars is big business, and an area in which gangs are prevalent. It involves stealing a car and then giving it false identification which matches a car of the same model and colour which has been written off for some reason. The mileage is also usually altered (that's called 'clocking') before the car is sold on to the unsuspecting customer. A surprising number of ringers or clocked cars end up in garage forecourts – perhaps the local garage in your campaign is in fact the base of operations for a ringing crew, and one of your PCs' cars has just gone missing…

Hopefully you've got enough information here to go away and create a gang, give them a location that will act as their base of operations, and to get them involved in a number of crimes. Then all you have to do is work out how to get the PCs involved, and, hey presto, you've got the basis for a scenario at least, and quite possibly an entire campaign. All that remains to say is that this feature is based on fictional portrayal of organised crime, with a smattering of 'real life' information from newspapers and television – ideal sources for inspiration and further information on gangland crime.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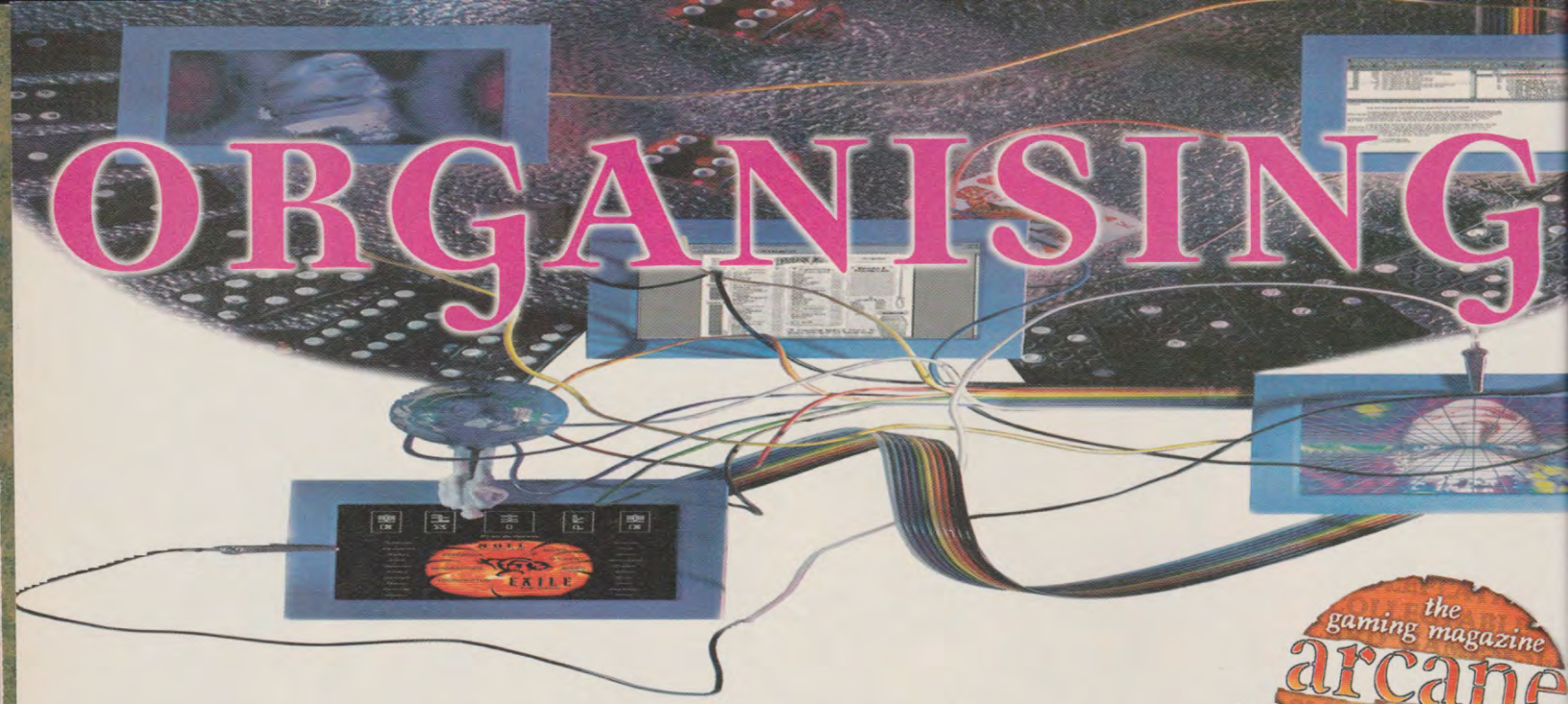
ORGANISING



the gaming magazine arcane REFEREES' ADVICE

Computers have far more to offer the referee of a roleplaying game than just a relaxing blast of Doom *after a hectic session. Our resident tech-head, Andy Butcher, offers some suggestions...*

Regardless of the game system being used, a roleplaying referee's greatest tool is his or her mind. Unfortunately, incredibly versatile and advanced though it is, the human brain isn't always as reliable as we might like it to be, especially when it comes to organisation. Imagination may be the key to a successful roleplaying campaign, but preparing and keeping track of everything as you go along can be almost as important.

There are many things that can help a referee with this side of things, and one of the most useful is a computer. They may not be up to much in the imagination stakes, but a personal computer can be an incredibly useful tool for the referee of a roleplaying game, freeing your over-taxed grey matter from the problems of bookkeeping and helping you to organise your thoughts and plans. With a little effort, a computer can put an end to piles of hastily scribbled notes, desperate flicking through rulebooks, and the horrible realisation that you've lost the statistics for a vitally important character. It can also help you design better adventures for your players. Finally, via the Internet, a computer can put you in touch with thousands of gamers and their ideas, and even the game companies themselves.

COME AND JOIN US ON-LINE

We make a big thing of the Internet, especially the World Wide Web, as a great place for all gamers to 'hang-out'. We all hang-out at the arcane Web site, which you can find at: `http://www.futurenet.co.uk`

What makes computers so handy?

There are two parts to being a referee – preparing and maintaining a campaign, and running the game sessions themselves. Each requires different skills and abilities, but a computer can help you with both.

Between sessions, you have to keep track of what's already happened in your game, come up with ideas about what might happen next and plan them out in some form. During a session, you have to run the game itself, which means you need to be able to find anything you need quickly and with a minimum of interruption to the game.

At the most basic level, computers are a great way of storing and retrieving information. For a start they don't forget things, and they don't lose post-it notes and other vital little pieces of information. If you use a computer to make your notes, you'll always be able to find them easily, and you won't lose them. Computers also let you play around with information with ease – rearranging and sorting it quickly.

It's this ability that makes computers so useful for referees. Even the simplest of campaigns quickly generates a vast amount of information, from the name of the barman that you made up on the fly, to the long-range plans of the PCs. Anything that lets you keep track of this stuff, organise it and then find it again later is going to be incredibly handy – and computers offer just about the best way to do this.

If you use the machine both during and between sessions, you can keep all the relevant information on it – this means that everything is in one place, and it's easy to find what you need. During a session you can make notes either directly on to the computer, or write them down and transfer them later. Then, when you need those notes again, you can find them easily.

Between sessions, you can go back through all the notes you made, organise them and use them to keep your stories consistent. You can also use the computer to help when creating new adventures and plots – and once again, it'll be easy to find them during play. The only limiting factor is the type of computer, and the software you have.

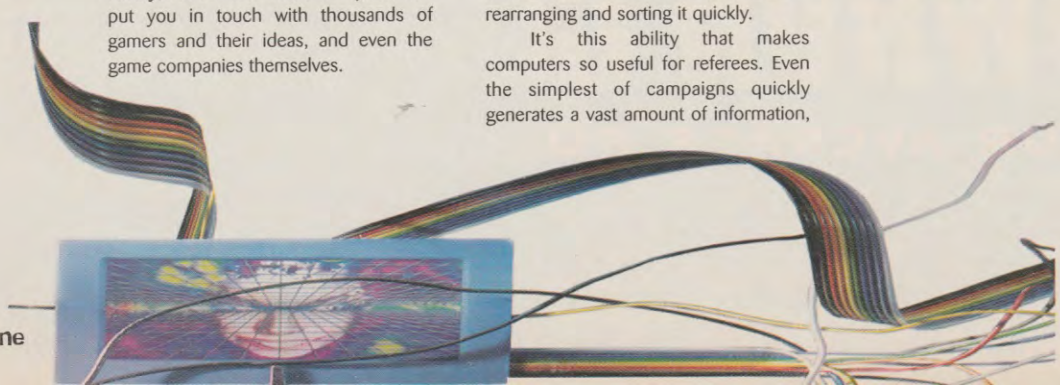
BUYER'S GUIDE

Begining on page 38, we've taken a look at the types of computer you can buy, and the advantages of each. We have also recommended a few manufacturers. If you want more options, try two of Future's other magazines, *PC Plus* and *PC Format*. Also, bear in mind that it's normally cheaper to buy direct from a manufacturer than from a high street shop, because you're cutting out the 'middle man'.

Hardware vs Software

What you can do with a computer is determined by what software you use. If you haven't got a computer, or are thinking of buying a new one, see the 'Hardware Heaven' boxout on page 38 for a comparison of the three main types of machine, and their strengths and weaknesses.

Assuming you have one, there are two ways you can use it. The first is when preparing for a game, the second is



during a session. What it can do for you in either depends on what software you have and how you put it to use. As far as roleplaying is concerned, there are three categories of programs available, each with different things to offer…

Applications

This covers all the common 'business software' – stuff that most PCs and PDAs (see 'Hardware Heaven' over the page) come with as standard. Although not specifically designed for use in roleplaying, these kinds of programs are by their nature flexible, and can be the most useful for any ref, both in and out of sessions. To make the most of them, you'll probably need access to a printer.

Word processors and desktop publishing programs are probably the most useful applications when designing and writing adventures for a campaign. Writing stuff on a word processor means you can edit and change it simply as new ideas occur to you, and even completely rearrange the whole thing – something that's hard to do with a pencil and paper.

Likewise, even a basic DTP package makes it simple to design player handouts such as letters, newspaper articles, stolen documents and so on, giving them an authentic look and feel. A little work on things like this can make a vast difference during play. Another great use of desktop publishing is character sheets. Few referees are ever happy with the character sheets supplied with games, and this makes it easy to design your own ones with the information you want on them.

Databases are designed to let you store and retrieve lots of information simply and quickly. What could be better for keeping track of all the important characters in your game, together with their statistics? Even very simple 'address book' programs can be used in this way. This is normally most useful during a session, and so you need to have the computer to hand. Assuming you do, it's a simple matter to find who (or what) you want to know about.

Spreadsheets, on the other hand, are another of the programs that are of more use between sessions. Whether you'll find them particularly handy depends largely on the style and type of

getting connected — what the internet can do for you

Of all the things that computers have to offer roleplayers, the most useful is access to the Internet. Thousands of gamers around the world are already connected to it, as are nearly all the major roleplaying companies (and many of the smaller ones). The benefits offered are vast.

What is the Internet?

Simply put, the Internet is a vast computer network that spans the world. Individual computers can connect to this network and, by using a standardised set of protocols (a 'common language' to communicate with each other), can access and transfer information from and to all the other computers on it. Because there are already millions of people connected, there's a frightening amount of stuff available – given time you can find almost anything.

It has to be said that the Internet isn't quite as wonderful as some of the media hype would have you believe – it can be slow, clunky and confusing to use at times – but despite this, it's incredibly useful.

How do I get on it?

The easiest way for most people to get access to the Internet is to use a home computer, a modem and a service provider. The modem enables the computer to connect to others via a telephone line. The service provider is a company that offers access to the Internet, normally charging a fixed monthly fee or by the hours you use. All you have to do is set up an account with a service provider, dial up the company's computer with yours via the modem, and your machine is connected to the Net.

There are a lot of service providers around, and it's becoming a competitive market as more people decide to get connected. Our advice is to shop around for the best deal you can find – you can try America On-Line on 0171 385 9404, Uunet Pipex on 0500 474739, or Demon on 0181 371 1234. You could also check out *.net*, Future Publishing's Internet magazine.

What can I do with it?

The Internet allows several types of communication between the computers connected to it. Of these the four most common each have several uses for roleplayers.

E-mail: This is the most basic Internet service, but one of the most useful. E-mail stands for Electronic Mail, and enables you to send messages to anyone else with an e-mail address. Because so many roleplaying companies have e-mail addresses, this makes getting in touch with them incredibly simple. In addition, nearly all roleplaying games are supported by at least one 'mailing list'. This is a group of people who communicate via e-mail to discuss the game. Every message you send is forwarded to everyone else on the list, and vice versa.

Newsgroups: Similar in some ways to mailing lists, Newsgroups are Internet 'bulletin boards'. Anyone with access to them can read any messages posted, and reply with their own thoughts. There are literally thousands of newsgroups, and dozens concerned with roleplaying. You can get or offer advice, help, or discuss roleplaying.

World Wide Web: Made possible by a relatively new set of protocols, the Web is largely responsible for opening up the Internet to so many people. Using a 'Web browser', you can connect to other computers and see 'pages' of information created by different people. Many roleplaying companies have Web sites with pages about their games, new releases, errata and so on, while there are thousands of personal sites created by other roleplayers. A *Shadowrun* player, for example, may have a site with pages about their own campaigns, optional rules, ideas and suggestions. The Web is the easiest part of the Net to use and the one with the most to offer.

FTP: This stands for File Transfer Protocol, and enables you to download files from other computers on the Net. Most WWW browser programs allow you to use FTP to download stuff from Web and FTP sites. You can get shareware programs, character sheets, maps and pages of information for just about any roleplaying game.

game you play. If you run any game which includes rules for the design of vehicles or weapons of some kind that you use regularly, such as *Traveller, MechWarrior* and *BattleTech, Heavy Gear,* or the *GURPS Vehicles* and *GURPS Robots* supplements, a spreadsheet is for you. With most programs it doesn't take too long to design a worksheet that follows the relevant design process, making it a simple matter to create hundreds of spaceships, robot fighting machines, or whatever. Instead of having to sit with a pad of paper and a calculator, working things out as you go, you simply enter the right numbers and the spreadsheet does all the work for you, enabling you to tweak and edit the design with ease.

Paint packages can come in very handy for the more creative referee. Simple maps are fairly easy to produce (although see the section on 'Commercial Software' below), as are blueprints, sketches and so on.

Finally, if you already know your way around a computer, learning HTML, the language on which the Internet's World Wide Web (see 'Getting Connected' on page 37) is based can be useful. HTML isn't very difficult to pick up, and it enables you to create 'hypertext' files where you can click on highlighted words to jump around in the document. Once you get the hang of how it works (or if you use one of the many HTML editor programs that does this for you), you can turn your adventures and other game materials into HTML documents, making them much simpler to refer to during play – click on a character's name to see his stats, for example.

Commercial software

There isn't much commercially available software designed for roleplaying games, but there are a few programs worth looking at, depending on your refereeing style and the system you play.

The *AD&D Core Rules CD-ROM* (reviewed in **arcane** 11) is perhaps the most ambitious. It contains the entire rules for TSR's *AD&D* fantasy roleplaying game on a CD-ROM, making it easy to find things during play, as well as a number of other features, including a character generator. Although not a particularly effective piece of software, it's a good example of what can be done. It's possible that more companies may release rules in this fashion in the future – a CD-ROM is a lot cheaper to produce than a book. It's also a great deal easier to carry around.

Of more general use is *Campaign Cartographer* (reviewed in **arcane** 1). This is a Computer Aided Design program that's been specifically written for use by roleplaying referees to create maps. Although fairly complex and taking some time to get to grips with, the results that are possible with *Campaign Cartographer* are very impressive. The basic program is mainly aimed at creating maps of countries and other large areas for fantasy games, but there are several expansion disks available that make it possible to create professional-looking maps of dungeons, cities, starships, buildings – just about anything. Not much use if you're not a big fan of maps, admittedly, but if you do use lots, or are designing your own world from scratch, *Campaign Cartographer* could be very useful indeed.

Finally, there's the aptly-titled *Tablemaster* (reviewed in **arcane** 7). This program enables you to create a wide variety of tables, and randomly generates results from them – it also comes complete with an impressive range of pre-generated tables. Again, the usefulness of *Tablemaster* is largely dependent on your style of refereeing and the system you play. If you play a 'fast and loose' style of game, and think that random tables might help spur your imagination, or if you play a system such as *Rolemaster* that uses a lot of tables, this can be very useful.

Shareware and Freeware

This category covers the vast majority of the software that's available on the Internet (see the 'Getting Connected' boxout on page 37). There's an impressive range of stuff available, although the quality and stability does tend to vary quite a bit. The most popular programs for people to write and make available seem to be character generators for their favourite systems – there are a couple for *Shadowrun* and one for *Call of Cthulhu* that are particularly impressive, for example.

A DIGITAL REVOLUTION?

So, if you've got a PC sitting in the corner gathering dust along with the odd letter to the bank or game of *Doom,* try making use of what it has to offer your roleplaying. Getting to grips with using a machine in this fashion can take a while, and to start with you may think it'd be quicker to do everything with pen and paper. But once you get the hang of things, more ideas will occur to you.

The organisation that a computer can bring to your gaming will not only give your campaigns more consistency, depth and detail, but like all good referee aids, it will free you to concentrate more on the important, fun aspects of refereeing. If you don't have to worry about finding the stats for the minor bad guy that the PCs have decided to track down and 'chat' to, you can spend more time thinking about his personality, and deciding what he actually knows about the plot in which the characters have become enmeshed. Eventually you'll wonder how you ever managed to run a game without a computer sitting next to your rulebooks.

HA

Of course, in order to take advantage of all that a computer has to offer as a tool for the referee of a roleplaying game, you're going to need one. If you don't already own a computer, buying one can be an intimidating task. Luckily, although the staggering variety of hardware on offer in any shop or magazine can seem a bit overwhelming, it can be broken down into three main categories. From the point of view of a roleplaying referee, each of these has its own advantages and disadvantages.

The Desktop PC

What most people think of when someone says 'computer', the desktop PC is by far the most common computer used in homes and offices.

THE GOOD

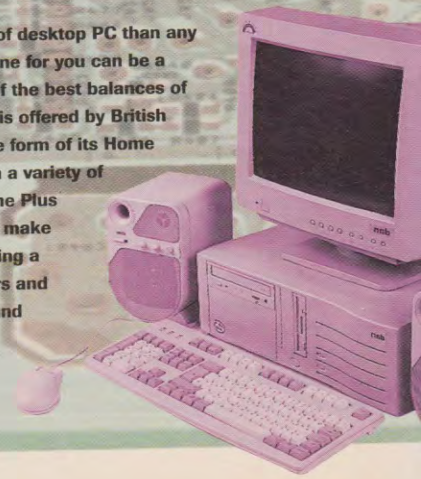
- **Power.** **Desktop PCs remain the most powerful type of home computer. Almost all of the major technological developments in personal computers are made with these machines in mind, and then trickle down to other types. Desktop PCs are faster, have more memory and storage space, and have better graphics and sound than any other type.**
- **Versatility.** **With all that power comes a lot of flexibility. Desktop PCs are the most versatile home computers, and are easily capable of everything we've looked at in this feature, and a whole lot more besides. All you need is the right software.**
- **Support.** **Fortunately, being the most common and popular machine, the desktop PC is also the best supported in terms of software and hardware. Everything from top-notch games to personal finance management software is available for desktop PCs, together with a vast array of peripherals including mice, joysticks, sound and graphics cards, speakers, processor and memory upgrades – everything you could ever need, and a whole lot that you probably won't.**
- **Value for money.** **Best of all, in terms of computing power per pound the desktop PC can't be beaten, and they're getting cheaper and more powerful all the time.**

THE BAD

- **Size.** **Desktop PCs are big, heavy affairs with lots of cables and three major components – the monitor, the computer itself and the keyboard – plus lots of bits and pieces such as the mouse and speakers. Although you can lug them about, it's a pain, and even then you need a fairly big space to set them up. Unless your group always comes round to your place to play and you have a large table, a desktop PC is difficult to use during a session.**

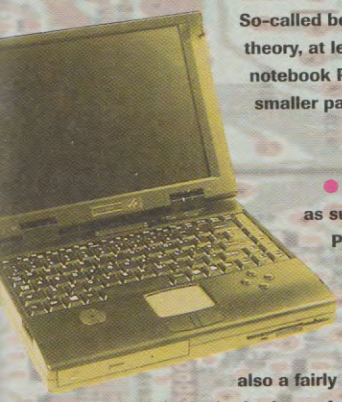
arcane recommends...

There are more makes and models of desktop PC than any other computer, and choosing the one for you can be a confusing business. However, one of the best balances of power, price and customer support is offered by British manufacturer Dan Technology in the form of its Home Plus PC/SMM range. Available with a variety of speed Pentium processors, the Home Plus PCs include everything you need to make the best use of the machine, including a CD-ROM drive, soundcard, speakers and built-in modem. Prices start at around £1,500 including VAT. Call Dan Technology on 0181 830 1100 or 0113 259 1200.



DWARE HEAVEN

The Notebook PC



So-called because of the way they fold open, and – in theory, at least – because of their size and portability, notebook PCs are desktop PCs squeezed into a much smaller package.

THE GOOD

- **They're PCs.** Notebook PCs are, well, PCs, and as such share many of the benefits of the desktop PC. Although generally not as powerful due to the difficulty of squeezing everything into a smaller package, they can use all the same software as desktop machines, making them almost as versatile and nearly as well supported. There's also a fairly sizeable selection of additional hardware available, in the form of expansions of one kind or another.
- **Size.** Unlike the back-straining monster that is a typical desktop PC, notebooks are designed to be portable – most are about the size of a magazine, and roughly two or three inches thick when folded – and will run on battery power for a few hours. Not only does this mean that they're easy to carry to your roleplaying sessions, it also frees you to work with them wherever you are.

THE BAD

- **Cost.** Unfortunately, you pay for all the work that has to be done to get a desktop PC into such a small space. For the same performance in terms of speed, memory and storage space, you'll normally end up having to splash out around two or three times the price for a notebook as for an equivalent desktop PC. Likewise, although they run all the same software as desktop PCs, any additional hardware expansions are also considerably more expensive.

arcane recommends...

The technology involved in notebook PCs is moving very fast at the moment, and many manufacturers seem to think that this type of machine is the 'future' of the PC. In the long-run this can only be good news, because competition drives prices down, but it does mean that it's hard to pick any one company that has a decisive edge at the moment.

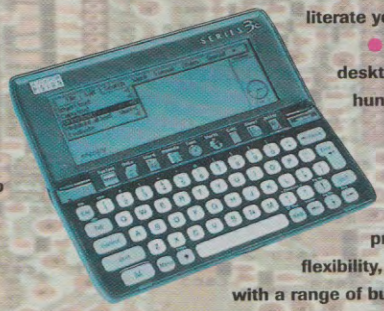
The notebook pictured here is a Notino Mover Plus from Hi-Grade, and weighs in at a little under £3,000. It's a good machine, being both fast and reliable, as well as having that all-important black plastic case for the fashion-conscious. You can call Hi-Grade on 0181 532 6110 and might also want to try Evesham Micros on 01386 765500.

The Personal Digital Assistant

Intended to act as a combination of notebook, diary and personal organiser, Personal Digital Assistant is the term used to describe a variety of small portable computers. Despite their mixed success, there's a fair range of these tiny machines available, and more are on their way from a number of manufacturers.

THE GOOD

- **Size.** The greatest advantage of PDAs is that they're tiny – even the largest are no bigger than a paperback book, and the smallest aren't much bulkier than a calculator.
- **Simplicity.** Although they lack the power and thus the flexibility of a PC, most PDAs have the advantage of being simpler to use. They're designed to be used by anyone, and so are normally a lot less of a headache to get to grips with than a PC. Of course, how much of an advantage this actually is depends on how computer literate you are in the first place.



- **Price.** PDAs are a lot cheaper than either desktop or notebook PCs, normally costing a few hundred pounds or less.

THE BAD

- **Power.** Or rather, the lack of it. PDAs just can't compete with PCs in terms of processing power. This in turn limits their flexibility, and what you can do with them. Most come with a range of built-in application programs that cover the basics, and some are even expandable via plug-in cards, but none offer the sheer range of options open to PCs.

arcane recommends...

Of all the PDAs currently available, by far the best supported and most flexible are the machines in the Psion Organiser range. As well as having a wide range of built-in applications, normally including a word processor, diary/time management program, spreadsheet, database and 'notebook', an impressive range of additional programs is available on plug-in cards. Psion Organisers can also be connected to a PC via a link-up cable, which vastly expands their usefulness by enabling you to transfer information to and from the PC. The Series 3C, pictured here, is available with either 1 or 2 Megabytes of memory with prices starting at around £340, although cheaper models are also available. Contact Psion on 0990 134224.

SO WHICH SHOULD I GET?

To be honest, the limiting factor when buying a computer is money – the more you have, the more choices and options are available to you. Notebook PCs offer the most flexibility and in many ways are the ideal computer for a referee, but their price-tags may put you off. If you can afford a decent notebook, though, it'll be able to do everything you want, both in and out of your gaming sessions.

PDAs are a lot more useful than you might think, and are the perfect tool when you're running a game. They're also (relatively) cheap. However, they won't let you get on the Internet, and are limited in their range of functions.

The best combination of flexibility and value has to go to desktop PCs. Although using them during a game is problematic, they're still immensely useful for preparation and bookkeeping both before and after each session. Most importantly, together with a modem, a desktop PC offers the easiest and cheapest means of getting on to the Internet, which is probably the most useful thing computers have to offer roleplaying referees (see the 'Getting Connected' boxout on page 37).

If you've got a little more money to spend, PDAs such as the Psion Organisers, which can connect to PCs, are the perfect complement to a desktop machine. The PDA is convenient to carry around and bring to sessions, thus making up for the PC's lack of portability, which is its only real drawback. You'll probably be able to buy both and still spend less than you would on a decent notebook PC.

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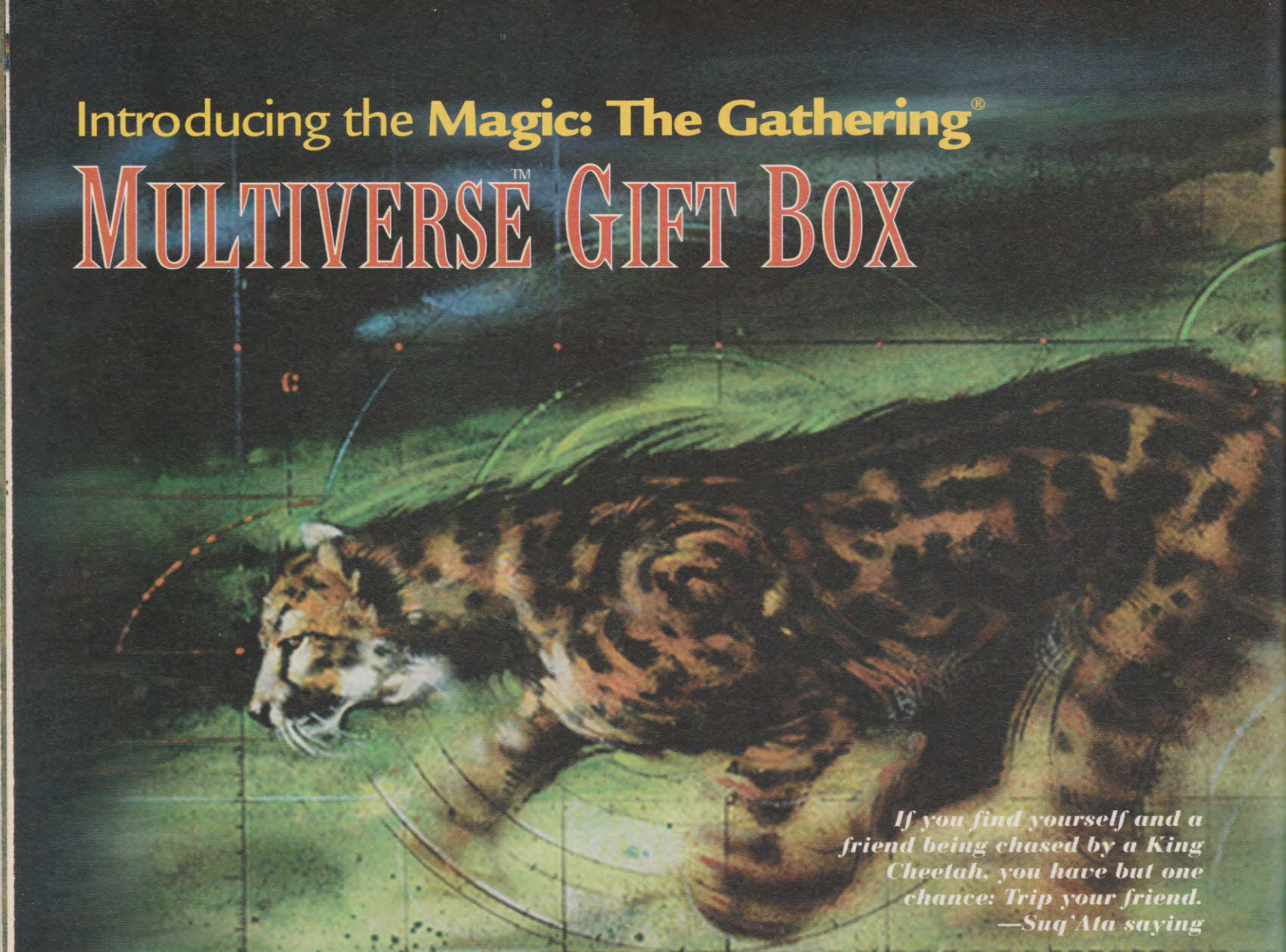

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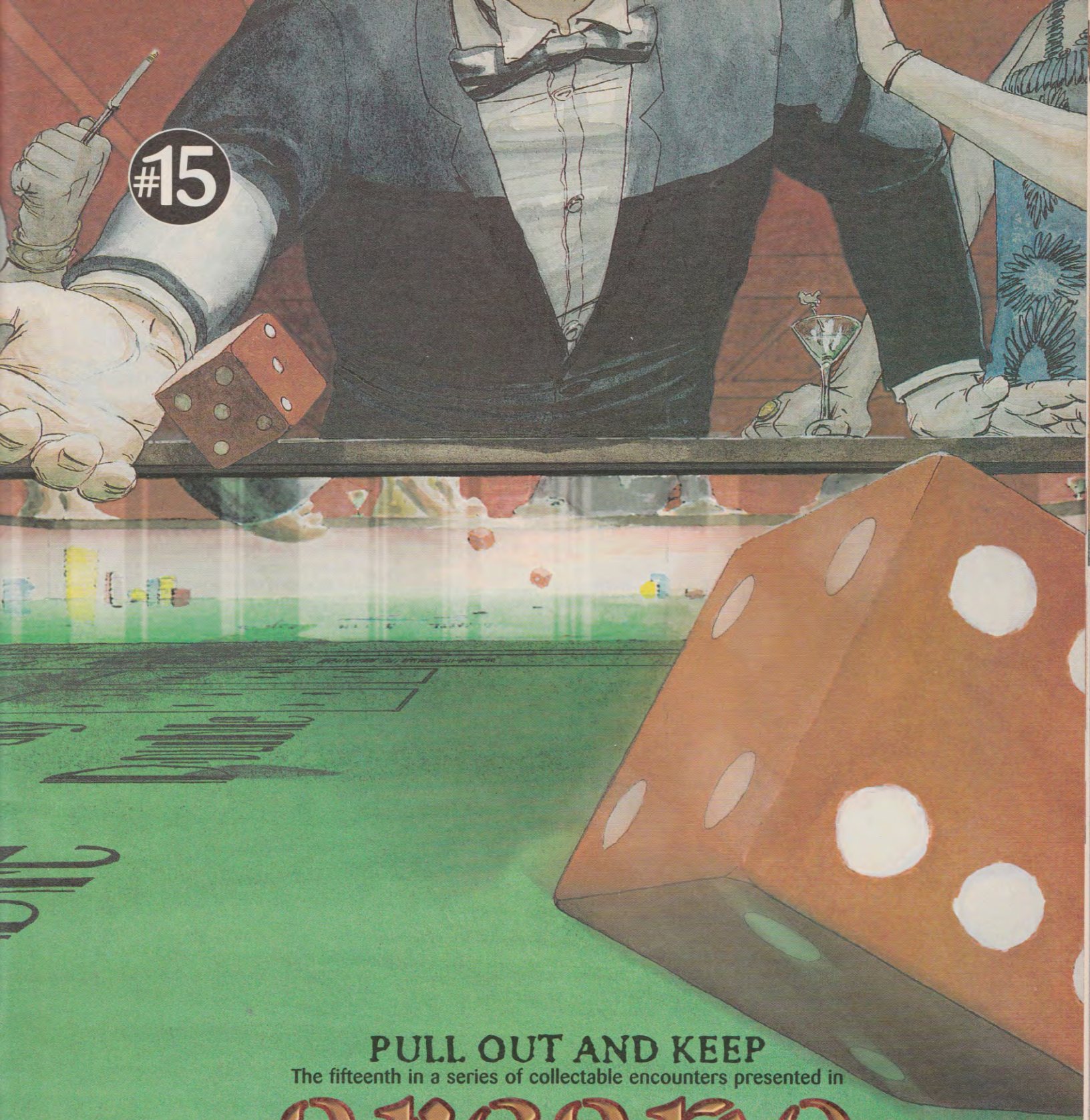


PULL OUT AND KEEP

The fifteenth in a series of collectable encounters presented in

arcane

the gaming magazine arcane
ENCOUNTER!
FREE MONTHLY PULL-OUT

Make your fortune, and then lose it again in MegaCasino, where the waitresses aim to please and the dealers aim to strip you of cash...

by Jo Walton

"There was everything to play for, and everything to lose. Calhoun pushed the winnings towards Rosanne. She took the notes and folded them into her bag, keeping the deeds and the diamond in front of her.

"Is everyone clear on the stakes?" Calhoun looked at me, a touch of uncertainty on his face. It was too late to back out now. His deal was different. If she or I won, the other two were penniless and left the fields forever. If he won I left, but Rosanne would marry him. She'd proposed the same to me, but I'd sooner marry a rattlesnake. If Calhoun won I'd go without even the satisfaction of knowing that she'd be in the same boat. I wondered how long he'd last after they tied the knot. She's had three husbands already, and one of her names is 'Black Widow'.

"I propose to alter them. We're all gamblers. Who else would come out here prospecting for diamonds? We're all determined people – how else could we three have got into the position where we control the whole diamond field?" She laughed. "We're letting a roll of the wheel settle the question of which of us becomes supreme. I suggest we widen matters. The deeds are here. We know each other too well. We probably all have plans. I know we're honest, I know the wheel is honest." She only thought she knew that. I'd fixed it myself. "Let's call in a fourth person. Let's risk everything and maybe give it all up to someone we don't know."

"That's insane!" I blurted.

"My whim," said Rosanne, holding out a cigarette for Calhoun to light. His hand was shaking.

"Let's roll for it," he suggested. Rosanne nodded. I nodded. We each pushed a token on to the board, and the hostess set the wheel spinning.

In the background we could hear the whirring of roulette wheels and the mutter of other patrons. Everything seemed vivid – the chandeliers, the red carpet, and the wheel, the turning red and black squares, the rolling clattering ball.

"Red!" said Rosanne. "You!" to the hostess. "Go into the outer room and find someone. Someone who's never been in here before. Bring them in here." The hostess opened her mouth as if to protest, then nodded and left.

"What will they wager, for the gain they might make?" Calhoun asked. Rosanne's smile widened as the door opened again.

"Their life!" "

Mega

This month we raise the stakes and try our luck in a gambling encounter. Welcome to the flirtatious world of the casino...

The Casino is a place to make your fortune, or lose it, play for high stakes and risk everything on one throw of the dice or turn of the wheel. It can be situated anywhere, in Monte Carlo or Las Vegas, in the backstreets of Manchester, on the edge of an area of new resources where people are getting rich quickly (as in the scenario on page 51), and in any time from the 19th century on into the future, on some colony world.

Winning and Losing

In the end, there is only one winner – the casino. There's just no way to beat the law of averages, and although it's possible to win in the short term it isn't in the long term. The casino makes a percentage on every game. This is usually 10% but can rise as high as 30% on slot machines. The way this is collected varies – in poker, which is a game of skill, the house collects a percentage of each bet, in games of chance it is a case of adjusting the odds so that the house makes its percentage.

The System

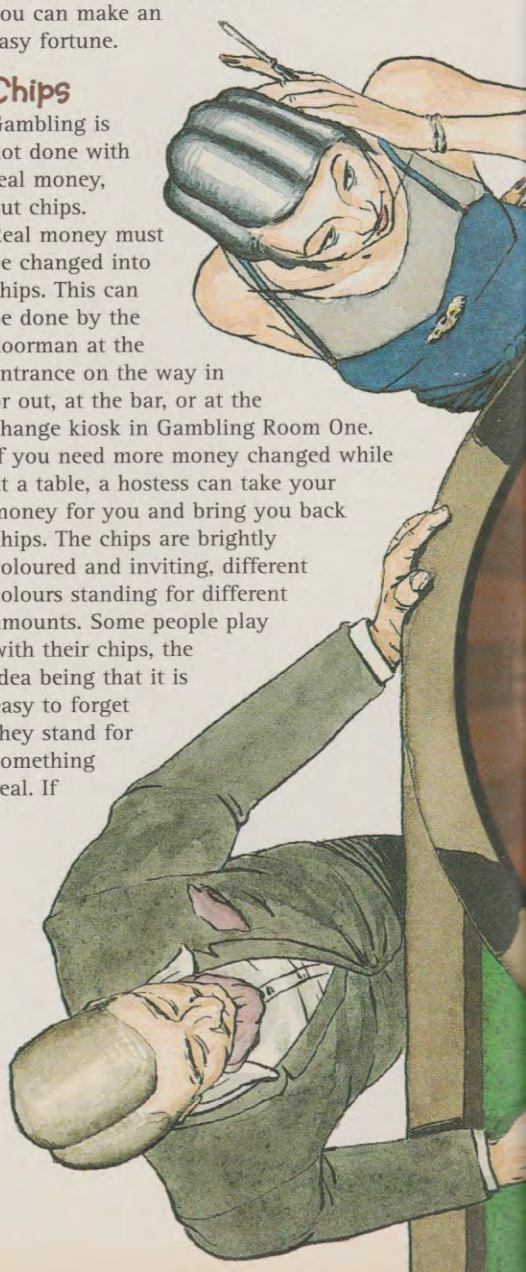
You'll notice that, even though we present character descriptions for the people involved with the MegaCasino, we don't provide you with any stats. That's a deliberate decision – you're supposed to be able to use this encounter with all manner of gambling campaigns, and there's no way we could provide stats for all of them. That shouldn't be a problem for you – just make up the stats for these characters yourself, using the descriptions as a starting point. Same goes for other 'system' details – make them up to fit your campaign.

Spending time and money in the casino

People spending time in the casino are given free drinks, sometimes free refreshments and other bonuses. Of course there is no such thing as a free lunch, and all this is intended to get their money spent on the important business of gambling. Everything in the casino is designed to entice you into risking your money, everything is telling you that you can make an easy fortune.

Chips

Gambling is not done with real money, but chips. Real money must be changed into chips. This can be done by the doorman at the entrance on the way in or out, at the bar, or at the change kiosk in Gambling Room One. If you need more money changed while at a table, a hostess can take your money for you and bring you back chips. The chips are brightly coloured and inviting, different colours standing for different amounts. Some people play with their chips, the idea being that it is easy to forget they stand for something real. If



Casino

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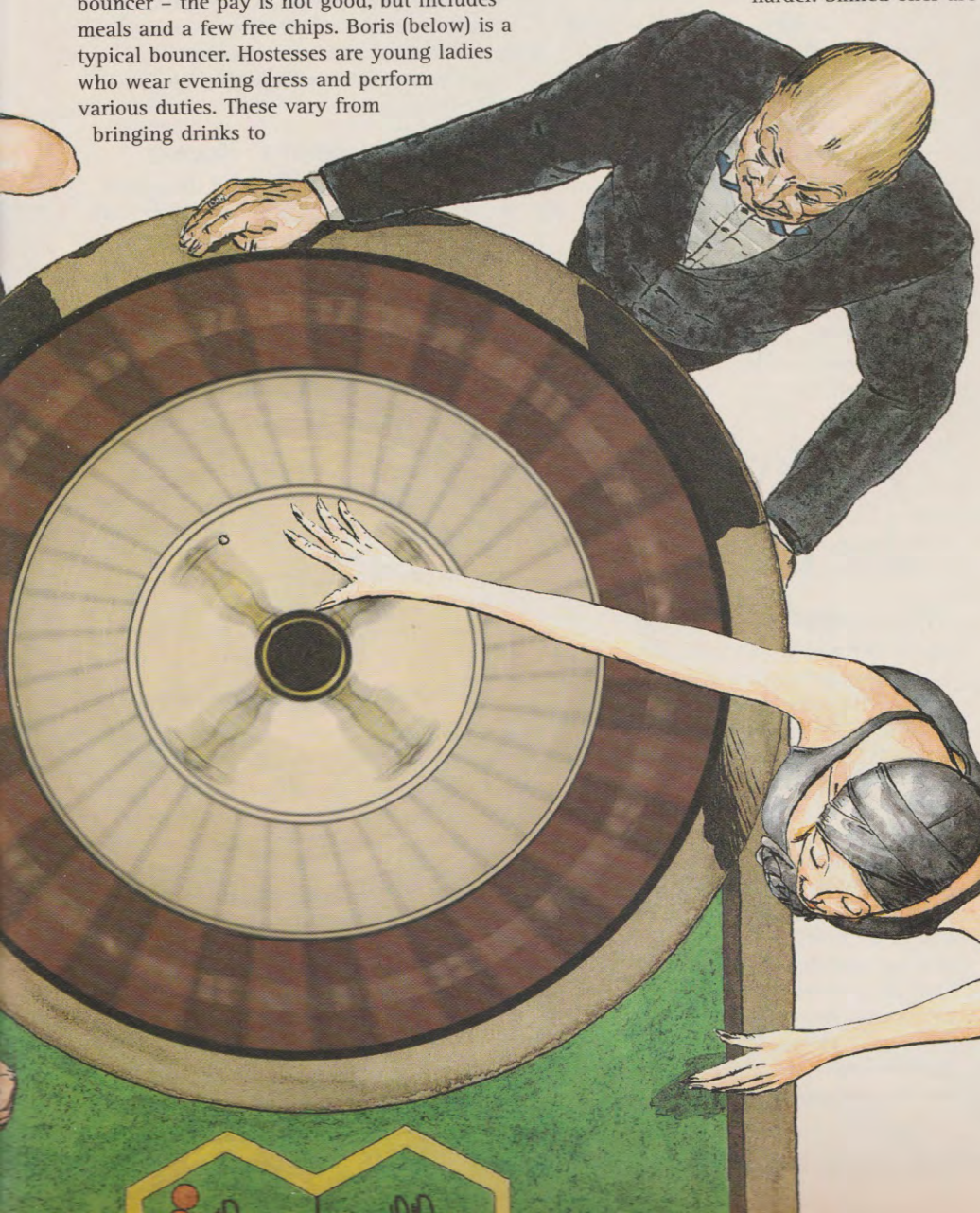
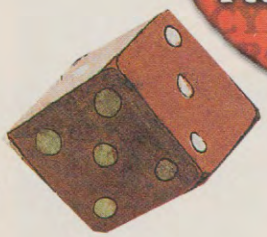
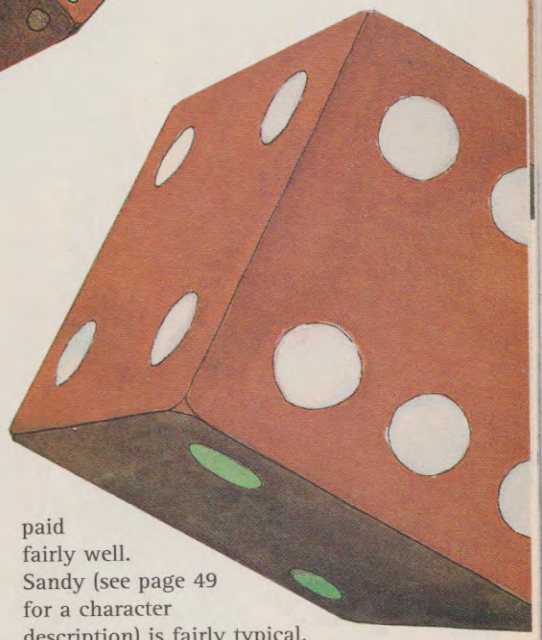
money is lent by the casino or by another gambler it should always be in the form of chips, but must always be paid back to them as real money.

Bouncers and Hostesses

There are a number of beefy tuxedoed bouncers dotted around the MegaCasino, in easy call of Mr Mega or the hostesses if there is any trouble. It should be possible for any hefty-looking male PC to get a job as a bouncer – the pay is not good, but includes meals and a few free chips. Boris (below) is a typical bouncer. Hostesses are young ladies who wear evening dress and perform various duties. These vary from bringing drinks to patrons to controlling the roulette wheels, dealing poker and generally overseeing the running of the tables. It should be possible for attractive female PCs to get employment whether they are skilled or not, or for skilled and experienced PCs of either sex and any appearance. Unskilled hostesses are paid the same as bouncers, though the work is much harder. Skilled ones are paid fairly well. Sandy (see page 49 for a character description) is fairly typical. It is also possible for PCs to gain employment in the kitchens, at very low wages. There is always a bouncer on the stairs preventing people who have no business in the inner room or the private rooms from going up.



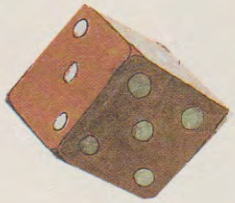




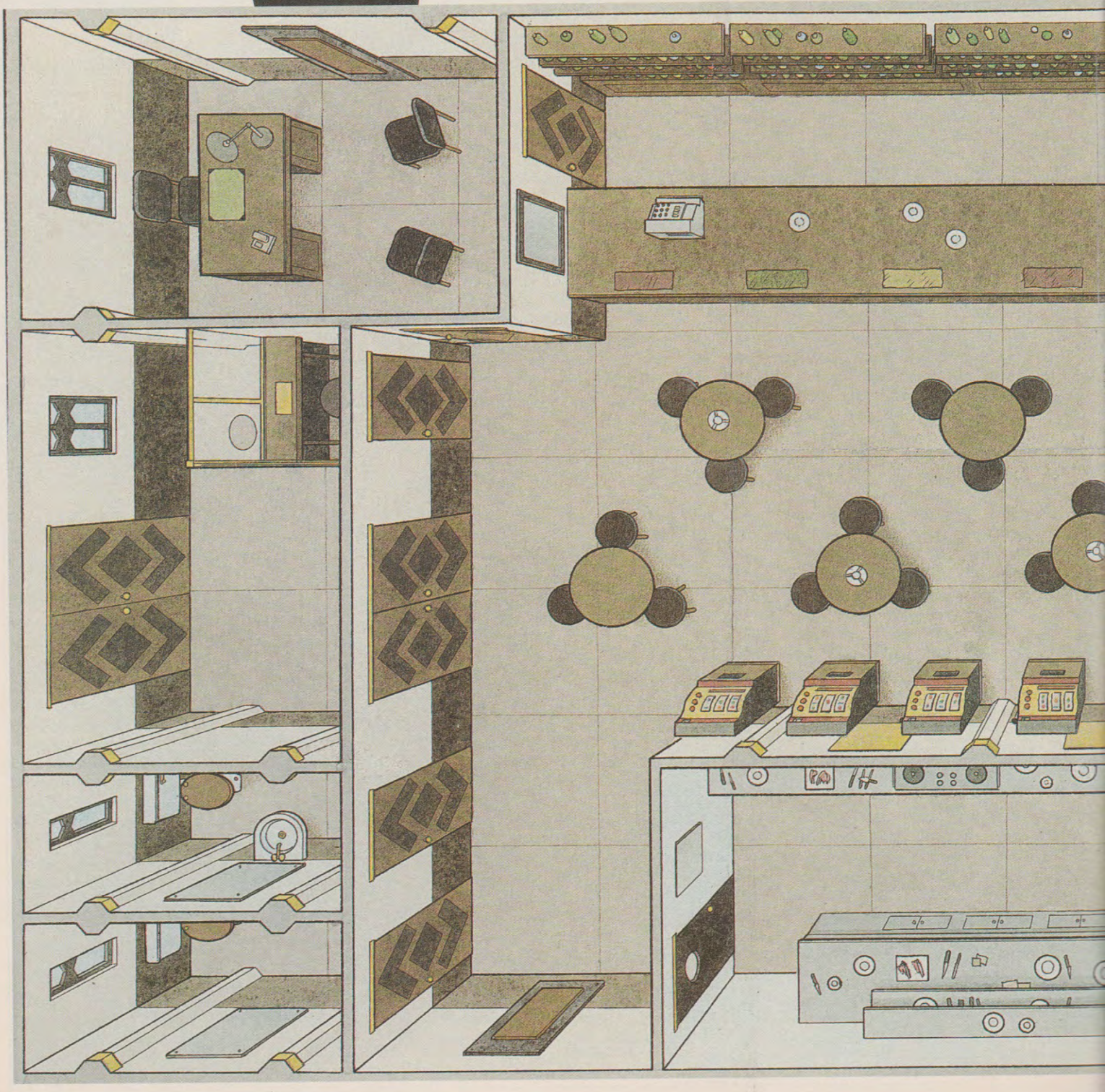
Games of Chance

Roulette

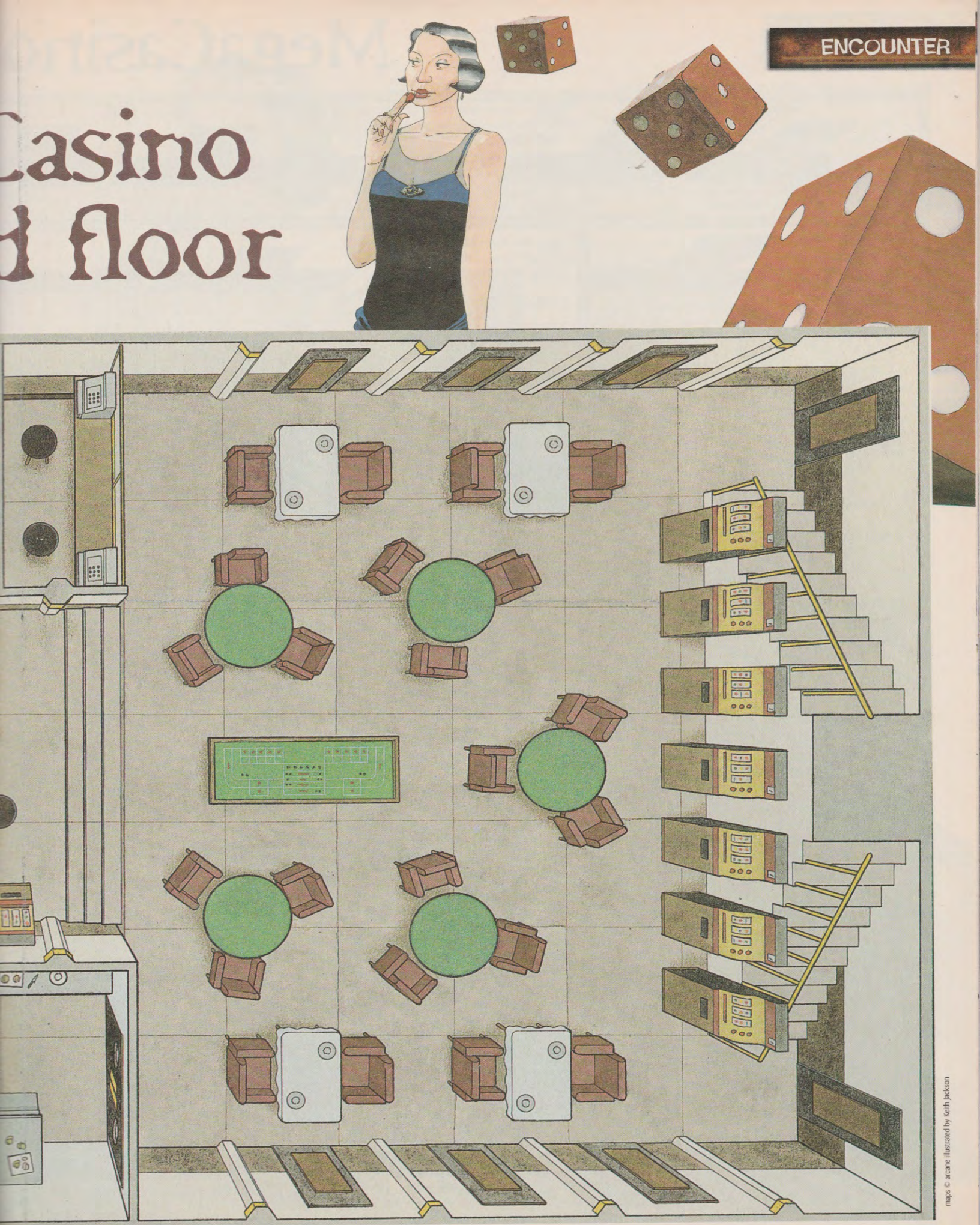
Other games of chance can be played anywhere, but roulette requires a wheel and a casino. It is played with a wheel which is marked with red and black numbered squares. A ball spins around in the wheel and comes to rest on one of the numbers. There are any number of complicated bets possible in roulette – betting on the number, on red or black, on odd or even, or any combination you can think of. If the wheel stops on 0 or 00 then all the money goes to the house.



Mega ground

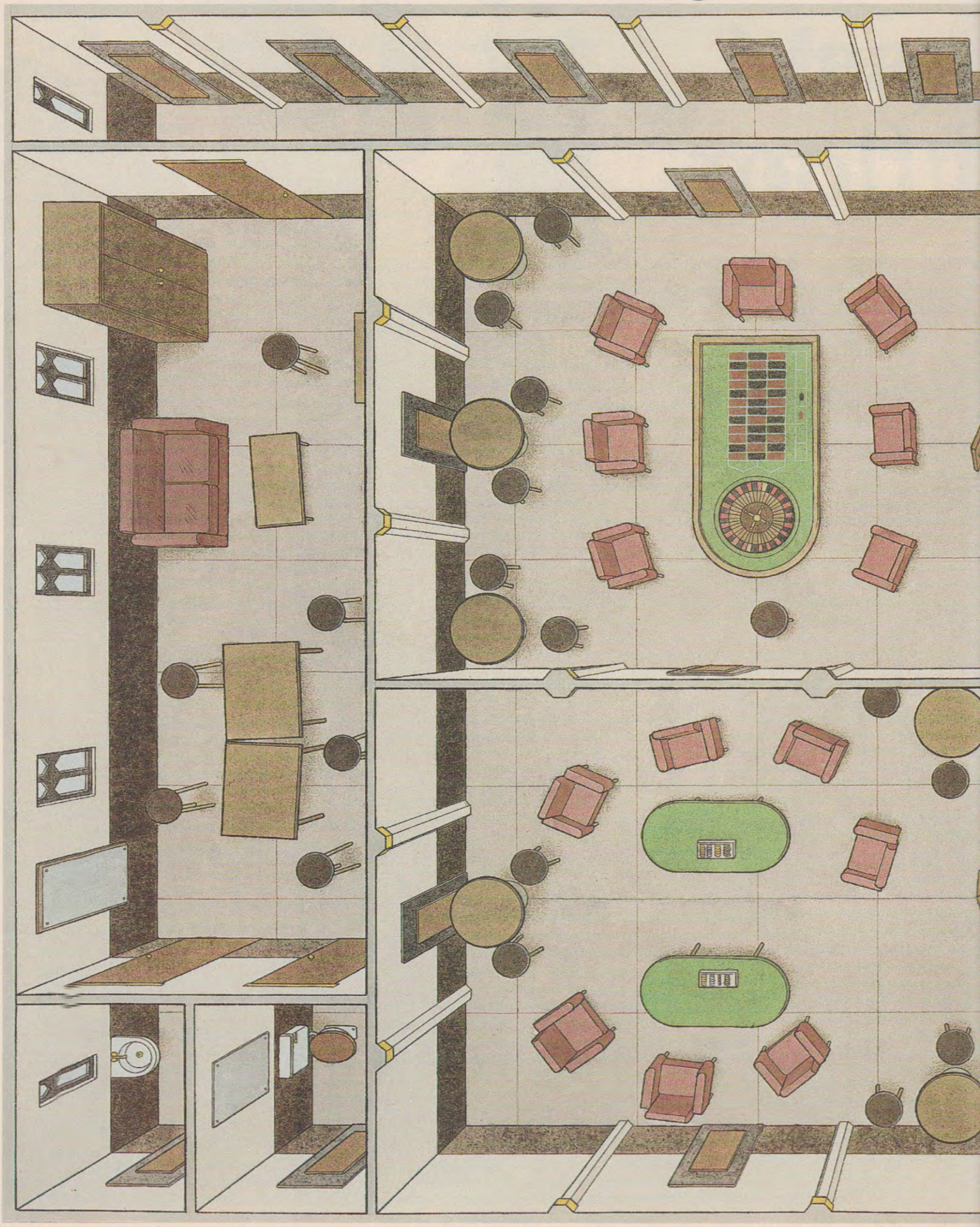


Casino
d floor



maps © arcane illustrated by Keith Jackson

MegaCasino



bet in any particular game) doesn't apply in the private members' rooms, and so the hardened gamblers are always trying to get themselves on the lists of players who are allowed to enter games held in these special rooms. However, a name can only be added to the list at the approval of the casino manager, and by at least one current private member. This way the rabble are kept out of these hallowed places.

Extra 'services'

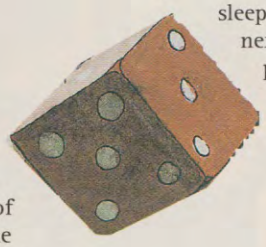
Because the casino makes a lot of money, it inevitably attracts the attentions of people who are involved in organised crime. These people generally have a good relationship with the casino bosses, and are more than willing to help Mr Mega and his valued friends out from time to time. If anyone who Mr Mega says is all right wants a 'little job' doing, then that job can usually be done, once a suitable price has been fixed. Of course, the reputation of the casino as a law-abiding establishment is of paramount importance, and therefore Mr Mega and his colleagues don't like to get too close to the criminal underworld, so anyone who wants to use him as a go-between must be trusted entirely.

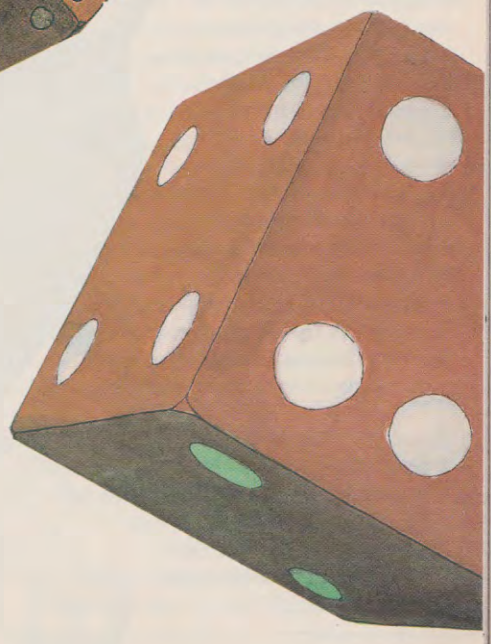
The organised crime bosses in the city have got another motive for being nice to Mr Mega – they hope that at some point they'll be able to persuade Mr Mega to let them buy some shares in the business, so that they can carry some weight, and ultimately get one of their own employees in to help run the casino. To be able to do this would help them out immensely, because casinos make ideal places through which to launder huge amounts of money. And then there are the other possibilities, such as selling drugs to the players and ensuring that the male gamblers who are alone have someone to share their beds with for the night.

Yes, the local gangsters have got plans for MegaCasino, but they're in no hurry – they've got plenty to be doing in the meantime, and they're happy to let their relationship with the casino carry on as it is... for now.

Plans for the future

Mr Mega has obviously got his own plans for the future of MegaCasino, and he could act on them at any time. There's a good chance that he could expand to build a snooker or pool hall – a bit down market, sure, but it would help to make him richer than he already is, and he could ensure that there's a separate entrance. And then there are always people at the end of the night who could do with somewhere to sleep, so why not build a hotel next to the casino. Yes, the possibilities are certainly there for a man of his entrepreneurial talents.





Sandy

Sandy's a hostess. She wears high heels, a little black dress and a big smile. She can shuffle four ways very quickly, spin the roulette wheel and endear herself to everyone. Sandy gets a buzz out of the casino, always coming in feeling tired and finding the atmosphere energising after a while. She doesn't spend much time in the hostess' room, preferring to be back out in the excitement and whirl of the casino. Working all night and sleeping all day means she's always a little pale. She accepts tips and drinks, and very occasionally goes home with a winner. She sometimes accepts bribes to rig games, even though she knows it would mean the sack if Mr Mega found out – not because she needs the money, but for the sheer thrill and risk of doing it.

In a purely realistic game that's all there is to her, a hard-working hostess who gets a charge out of the crowd. In a world with a little magic or strangeness, she may be a form of succubus, drawing energy from the gamblers, and occasionally draining one completely. Or she may be a vampire doing the same sort of thing – night work is always valuable for vampires.

Quotes: "Will you hold, or twist?"

"Why thank you, yes, I would like a double gin and lime."

Rosanne: The Black Widow

Rosanne isn't really a gambler at all. She always attributes her success in life to skill and nerve, rather than luck. A pretty face and attractive body doesn't do her any harm either. She came out to the diamond fields with her first husband. He died of a disease leaving her with only a few dollars. She came into the casino with this tiny inheritance, put it all in the first slot machine and won big. If she has to count on luck she will, but she prefers to cheat. Some say she cheated even that first time, doing something to the machine to make it pay out. Since then she has married twice more, and rumour says that her husbands died very conveniently.

She always wears little black dresses and Chanel Number 5 perfume, and is invariably heavily made up. She is pretty but predatory, and her nickname suits her well. She is very good at business dealing and thoroughly enjoys flirting with people.

Quote: "You need a steady nerve and a degree of skill to win at this game."

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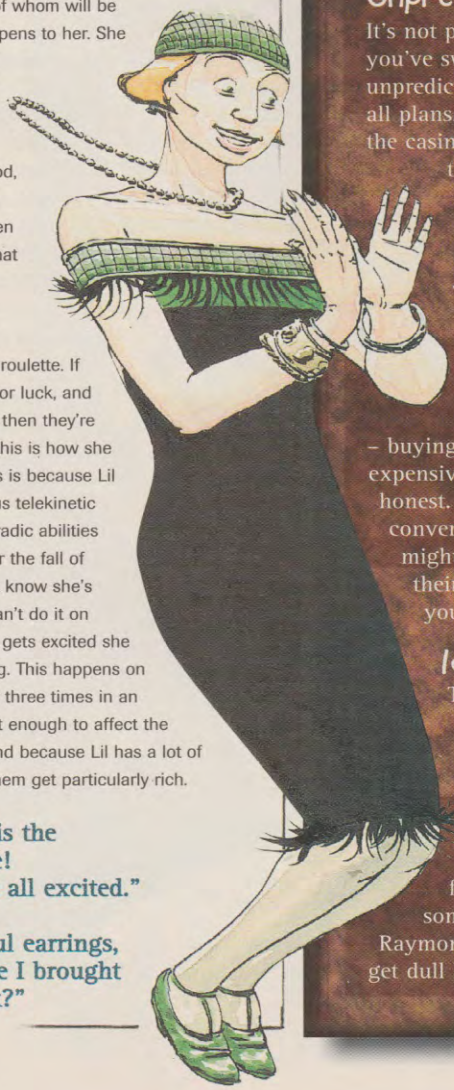
Lucky Lil

Lucky Lil isn't a gambler herself. She doesn't have the money. She just likes to hang around with people who have money, and likes the casino. Lil works as a waitress by day, but she spends most of her evenings in the casino. She's not a prostitute, and is most offended if accused of doing it for money. But she admits to liking men who can give her presents. Attractive though Lil is, she's not terribly intelligent. She doesn't use or carry any weapons, and even though she knows some of her friends have shady reputations she isn't involved in anything illegal herself. Amiable and friendly, she has a lot of connections with people involved at all levels in society, all of whom will be upset if something happens to her. She isn't bright enough to manipulate her contacts, she just likes dinners out, champagne and good, expensive clothes. Some of her gentlemen friends have noticed that if Lil is with them in the gambling room they tend to win. Not at cards, but at dice or roulette. If she gives them a kiss for luck, and watches as they play, then they're lucky in those areas (this is how she earned her name). This is because Lil has some unconscious telekinetic skill, and she has sporadic abilities to fudge the wheel, or the fall of the dice. She doesn't know she's doing it, and she can't do it on purpose, but when she gets excited she does it without knowing. This happens on average only two or three times in an evening, which is not enough to affect the house percentages, and because Lil has a lot of friends none of them get particularly rich.



Quotes: "This is the big one! Oooh! I'm all excited."

"What beautiful earrings, and just because I brought you luck?"

Adventure Seeds

The Chips are Down

The casino management or an enemy cold-bloodedly decides to try to get the PCs into debt, in order that they become biddable for some nefarious purpose. This entails letting them win and then lose, and extending loans and credit as necessary – as long as they are stupid enough to keep taking it up to the point where it is sufficient to get the party to do what they want. This works much better if the characters are using chips, if the credit is worked out in advance not giving them time to think, and if they are fortunate enough to win some of the time. It is also possible to trick them by using chips of a different colour and much higher denomination than the players are expecting.

Making it Big

This can combine well with the previous adventure seed. If there is something the party members particularly want to win from someone, they have to keep playing until it is on the table.

Unpredictable

It's not possible to catch the villain, but you've sworn to bring him to justice. He is unpredictable and somehow manages to foil all plans. The only place he visits regularly is the casino – he is using the outcome of the third roll of the dice on table 7 after midnight to decide what he will do next, which is why no-one can predict his moves.

The Man Who Broke the Bank

If the PCs win big, what then? Everyone in the casino knows, and immediately comes crowding round – buying drinks for everyone can get expensive and not everyone is completely honest. Some might engage you in conversation while trying to rob you, others might engage you in conversation while their friends set up a little surprise on your way home.

Ideal Meeting Place

The casino is the ideal place to meet someone. This could be a client, a patron, someone from the underworld or another country. A patron can insist on meeting over a gaming table so that the NPC can assess the PC's nerve for a big job. While they're there something can happen – remember Raymond Chandler's line, whenever things get dull have a man with a gun burst in.

The Boss

The Boss is a Mafia (or similar) boss, who comes to the casino regularly. He doesn't like to play with newcomers and frowns at anyone he doesn't know who approaches his table. He always has a girl with him (sometimes Lil) and two armed bodyguards stand behind his chair. If the party uses the casino regularly he begins to recognise them, but until then he views them with complete suspicion. You may find you need a reason to get the players involved with The Boss – he might be playing with someone who has something they need, for example. Or they might not notice him until too late. In any case, a game with him is a fraught experience. He slams cards and money down on the table and rarely says an extra word. If he is losing he demands neck rubs from his girl, he snaps his fingers for drinks and growls if they don't arrive quickly enough. He flicks ice from his gin and tonic at anyone who is not quick enough when it is their turn. He may also order sandwiches and insist that his fellow players eat the gherkins, whether they want to or not. He will laugh at first and then insist. If there are female PCs playing he treats them exactly the same as the men unless they start to win, in which case he makes a loud offer to a male PC to swap girls. If anyone gets annoyed at his behaviour he calls a bouncer and asks for them to be sorted out. The bouncer asks if there's going to be any more trouble, and if the answer is anything other than "No" or an apology, he throws the patron out unless there is a very good reason not to.

The Boss is a regular, favoured client. Playing with The Boss is harrowing enough, but as long as the PCs lose, that's all there is to it. If they win, however, especially if they win a lot of money from him, The Boss starts to get annoyed. And when he gets annoyed he isn't obnoxious anymore, he's just powerful. He has a big organisation behind him, and they all have weapons and obey his every whim. Gambling is entertainment, taking people out is business. If anyone has taken more than £1,000 of his money, it becomes business. This can give a party an unexpected enemy, especially if they won from him as an incidental part of winning something they wanted from someone else. The Boss does nothing to indicate that he will be setting organised crime on their tails, but the lackeys who come after them will certainly let them find out. When dealing with The Boss' subordinates, PCs may find it generally more diplomatic to hand back the money before being given the concrete overcoat.

Hustle

The PCs get on what seems to be a winning streak, and the people they are playing with encourage them to play bigger and bigger

until they lose more than they can afford. If they quit then, they are ahead, but if they continue to try to win it back they can lose everything. This is different from 'The Chips are Down' (see left) because they know what they're doing – they're being hustled but not tricked with credit. When they wager their house, their car, their spaceship, the next ten years of their income, they know they are doing it. This can also work well if the party has an NPC patron who gets into this, possibly while the party is off meeting someone in a private room. The party members return to see him taking off his gold watch as he shakes hands goodbye, and they go out to find that they are walking home. "I know I said I'd pay you for this job, but meanwhile can you lend me ten dollars until Friday? Please?"

Cheat

If the party members are rich or have been winning, they may be approached by Sandy, or another hostess, with an irresistible proposition. She tells them that one particular roulette wheel is fixed – she's realised, from working night after night, that the tenth time it rolls it always stops on a particular number. She explains that she doesn't have much money herself, but if they give her £1,000 out of their winnings she will tell them which number and which wheel. She should be reluctant to give them this information until they promise – it should be necessary for them to wheedle her and try hard to get it. This should encourage them to trust that she is telling the truth. They then bet most or all of their money on that number, which of course doesn't win. This is a scam which Mr Mega has set up with Sandy to prevent anyone getting too much ahead. If they start to make a fuss the bouncers come and throw them all out of the casino. If she is challenged about it she says that maybe the wheel got fixed when she was off-shift and it isn't her fault. She's a pretty good actress and can be very convincing.

The Scenario

Odds Calhoun, Rosanne the Black Widow and Diamond Jack Marshall are gambling for control of the diamond business. Two of them leave the table as beggars, or all three of them if the fortuitous stranger they invite to play with them carries on being lucky.

Rosanne has proposed introducing a stranger because she does not trust the other two to let her enjoy her winnings if she gets lucky. She has arranged a set-up with Sandy so that the stranger will win, and she's arranged it for the stranger to be a good friend of hers.

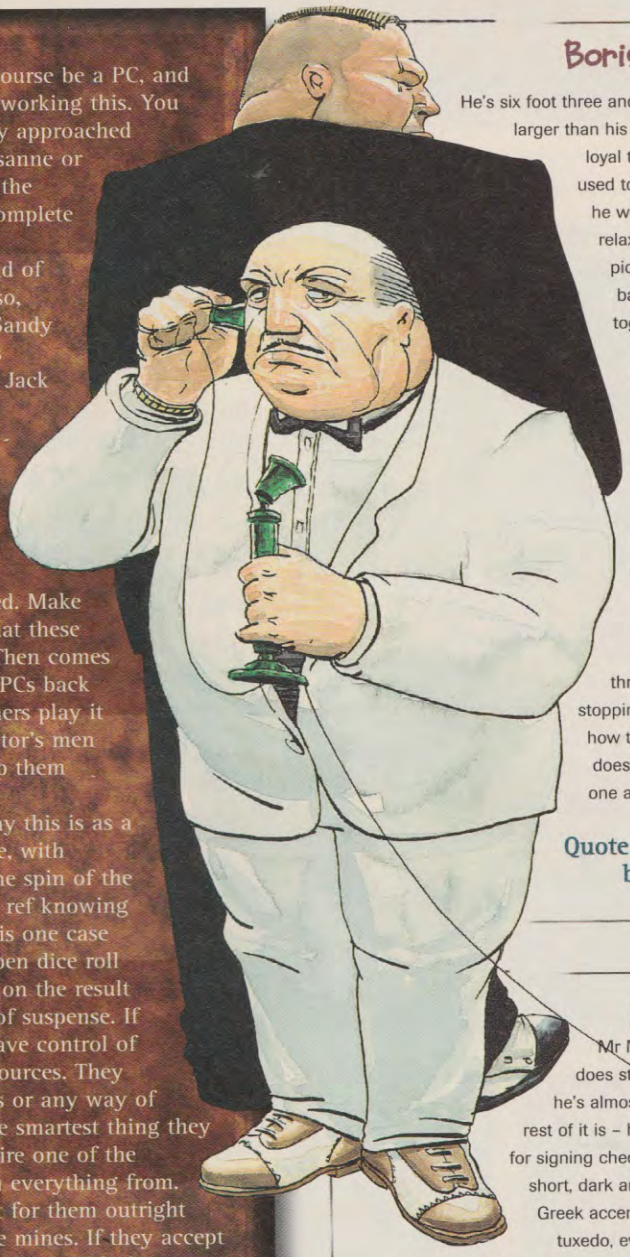
The stranger should of course be a PC, and there are a few ways of working this. You can either have the party approached earlier in the day by Rosanne or her agents and agree to the deal, or they could be complete innocents who Sandy accidentally picks instead of the planted stranger. Also, although Rosanne and Sandy believe that the wheel is rigged, in fact Diamond Jack has replaced it with a genuine unrigged wheel - which gives an equal chance to everyone.

They play a few preliminary games without high stakes and then the stakes are raised. Make it clear to the players that these people mean business. Then comes the final throw – if the PCs back out at this point the others play it out and some of the victor's men attack them later to stop them talking to anyone.

The best way to play this is as a genuine game of chance, with everything resting on the spin of the wheel and not even the ref knowing what will happen. This is one case where a genuine and open dice roll with everyone hanging on the result can cause a great deal of suspense. If the players win, they have control of an area of immense resources. They don't have any contacts or any way of really controlling it. The smartest thing they can do is probably to hire one of the people they've just won everything from. Calhoun offers to run it for them outright for half the value of the mines. If they accept this offer they will be rich, though they may not make it safely home with their winnings, or even out of the casino if they're tempted to stop and try their luck. Calhoun does not stick to this bargain and tries to waylay them later. Diamond Jack offers to manage the fields for them at 10 percent per year – this would bring them in a steady income and also headaches from time to time. Jack does not attack them, and even provides guards for them if they ask him. Rosanne attempts to marry a male PC winner if possible. Needless to say, such a match is not made in heaven and probably won't last long.

Next month

In next month's encounter we enter the hushed cloisters of Orontal Monastery, where the brothers look after the power of the Oracle – don't miss it in arcane 16 which is out on Friday 24th January.



Boris

He's six foot three and his shoe size is larger than his IQ, but Boris is loyal to the core. He used to play rugby and he weight trains for relaxation – he can pick up two men, bash their heads together and carry them out one under each arm without even being out of breath. In fact, this is his favourite trick. He's a bouncer, he wears a black tuxedo, and nobody would consider threatening him or stopping him. He knows how to use a gun, but doesn't usually carry one around with him.

Quote: "This one, boss?"

Mr Mega

Mr Mega's name really does start with 'Mega' and he's almost forgotten what the rest of it is – he doesn't even use it for signing cheques anymore. He's a short, dark and portly man with a Greek accent. He always wears a tuxedo, even first thing in the morning. Mr Mega eats all his meals in the casino restaurant, spends most of his time in the gambling rooms and the rest in his office, rarely leaving the premises. The casino is his livelihood, and he wants to know if there is anything wrong. He will immediately summon his bouncers if there is a disturbance. Although he has a shady background and does not like to answer questions about where he acquired the money to open the MegaCasino, Mr Mega is now an upstanding member of the community who pays his taxes and bills on time. He also pays off various protection rackets and police forces as necessary. He just wants to make a profit, which he does, and doesn't want anything to close the casino or stop it from making money.

Quotes: "It's so nice to see you here at the MegaCasino. I do hope you're enjoying everything."

"Boris, Carlos, find out what that disturbance is and stop it at once."

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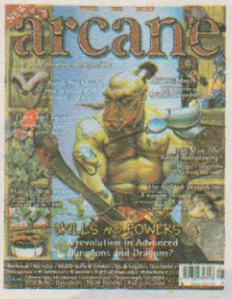

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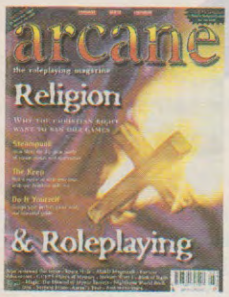

Issue 6 explained why the Christian right wants to ban RPGs, reviewed *Netrunner* and gave you a Keep in the Encounter pull-out.

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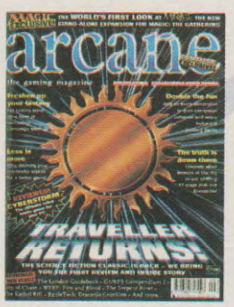

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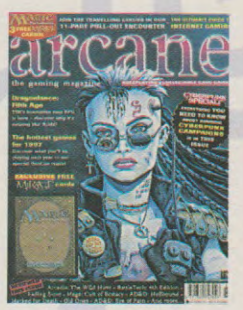

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Issue 5 had Richard Garfield's ideas on *Netrunner*, reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages* and the Train pulled into our Encounter.

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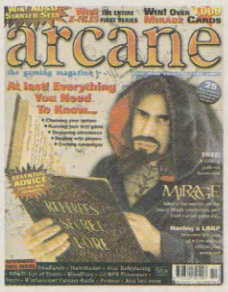

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MAKING THE M

*Spell-casters are not always given the attention they deserve in RPGs. **Phil Masters** works some magic of his own on these versatile characters.*

Let's begin with a confession. The starting point for this feature was my annoyance with a certain very successful trading card game. In this game, players take the role of magicians, who are clearly extremely powerful people. They draw power from huge tracts of countryside – mountains, islands and swamps – and use it to summon up armies, demons and war-beasts, and to equip their forces with mighty weapons. And yet, so far as I can make out, the background story to this game shows magicians behaving in a trivial way, basically serving as freelance technicians and fighting arena duels for public entertainment.

This is silly. These characters who can apparently blow away whole towns, peddling their skills like common mercenaries? Why aren't they sharing out the whole world for magical control and exploitation?

This ludicrous image goes back further in gaming. The traditional view of game mages is that they are essentially wandering artillery pieces, who usually start their game careers as feeble wimps with one or two good spells, protected by the armoured fighters in exchange for their occasional usefulness. Eventually, they become fairly powerful, but by then their 'bodyguards' will be so tough and well-equipped that the wizards still have to treat them as equals.

Now take a look at wizards and enchantresses in myth and classic fantasy. They are weird, powerful and enigmatic. They may behave as stupidly as any game mage, but at least they do it their own way, and usually on a grand scale. Merlin can transport whole armies round the countryside; a minor witch in the Arabian Nights takes an island full of people and transforms it into a lake full of fish, thousands of miles away; Prospero binds spirits, whips up a storm and creates complex illusions for casual entertainment. Okay, Gandalf does little but throw a few pyrotechnics about (and wrestle a Balrog into submission), but he's really an angelic being, sent to advise mortals rather than to blow away evil singlehandedly. In fact, I would suggest that fictional magicians with mediocre 'light artillery' powers are mostly limited to stories by writers influenced by modern fantasy games.

But games generally start PCs off as fairly weak, so spell-casters can't act like the myths. Instead, we get excuses. We are told that these are young, trainee wizards, just starting out on their careers; the mages of legend are equivalent to the same characters after years of learning and experience.

Sorry, but that doesn't convince me either. Magic is usually supposed to be a matter of complex scholarship, mastered by intensive study and long practice. Those young, trainee wizards shouldn't be off playing with the junior warriors, they should be students or apprentices, ruining their eyesight in libraries as they struggle to learn enough to make their magic safe and reliable. Again, look at the legends – the archetypal junior magician is the Sorcerer's Apprentice, a comic blunderer who has to be pulled out of the mess he's made by the experienced magician for whom he works.

I want to suggest that games should treat magicians differently – they should, in fact, take them seriously (or should have the honesty to treat them as truly comic figures). If this means a completely new sort of gameworld, with magicians shifted to the centre of things, then so be it. The existence of real, fairly reliable magic would change any world completely and, frankly, a realistic treatment of this would be a lot of work and quite hard to do convincingly. On the other hand, even a relatively simple, non-intellectualised sort of game should pay some attention to the place of wizards and spell-casters in its world.

So, it's time we looked at some options concerning gameworlds and the place of spell-casters therein. This needn't necessarily mean making them grossly powerful, but it should mean taking what

SPELLS THAT SATURATE SOCIETY

If magic wielders are just a part of society, then it seems logical to have spells available throughout all areas and levels of society. In roleplaying terms, *RuneQuest's* world of Glorantha probably comes closest to this.

LITERARY INSPIRATION

The classic modern fantasy concerning the nature of magic, and how its users might live, is Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* series.

CONSPIRE TO SUCCEED

There are a number of modern-day conspiracy games on the market, some of them involving secret groups of magicians – see, for example, Atlas Games' *Over the Edge*.

G OVER AGE

the gaming magazine arcane REFEREES' ADVICE

they do seriously. Note, incidentally, that it's easy to combine two or more of the ideas discussed here. For example, in White Wolf's *Mage*, PCs are persecuted, hunted mages, but their enemies belong to a completely different mage faction, the Technocracy, who are quintessential Secret Masters. And note also that most of these ideas can throw up more than one possible way of using magic in a game – see the boxouts below and over the page for more details.

Persecution complexes

Making magicians special needn't mean making them all-powerful; perhaps the talent isn't an advantage but a problem, and magicians are actually hated, hunted and shunned. This is a gameworld for *X-Men* fans and neurotic adolescents, in which magic wielders are persecuted for being special. The key cultural reference here is to the witch trials of European history, although plenty of other cultures have gone in for such persecutions – the Zulus had their witch-finders, and the samurai associated magic with the hated ninja. Few historical societies trusted magicians entirely, except perhaps a few diviners and healers.

Obviously, in a gameworld where magic is real, the nature of the persecutions will be a little different, but plenty of people have been persecuted for their true natures in reality. In such a world, PCs will usually be heroic outlaws, defending themselves courageously against the evils of intolerance and blind fear, and seeking to bring about a saner world. They may well all be magicians, although they could also include sympathisers of various kinds, loyal servants and guards, and so on. Conversely, if magicians are hated for good reasons – if, for example, magic always involves unleashing unspeakable horrors on the world – then PCs could be heroic, non-

SUSPICIOUS SPELL-CASTING

Settings where magic is viewed with justified suspicion, and heroes oppose it, tend to emphasise the idea that it's linked with chaos or inhuman powers. See games such as *Call of Cthulhu* or *Warhammer FRP*.

On the nature and frequency of magicians

Two questions are crucial to the subject of spell-casters in games: what does it take to use magic, and what proportion of the population has got it? Do these people spend all their time hunched over cauldrons, or does magic need a megalomanical personality to get anywhere? Are wizards like research scientists, priests of strange powers, or spirit-commanders? And how many are there?

Magical ability may be determined by innate talent or education. If talent is random, magicians will have to look out for promising youngsters to recruit, while if it tends to be easily inherited, families of court advisors or magician-aristocrats will tend to arise. If power mostly comes from intelligence and the right education, wealthy families would tend to get at least some of their offspring trained up; unless there are good 'open' colleges of magic this would lead to more centralisation of power. However, if the training is hard, or if it tends to make students eccentric, parents might well be in two minds about sending their offspring to learn magic, and it might become the province of younger sons, surplus daughters and annoying but valuable minor relatives. Obviously, it is possible for magical characters in some games to include all of the above-mentioned types and more. But if magic demands a particular mind-set then quite likely this will be reflected in a magic wielder's position and image in the world.

The frequency of talent has a large influence on the likely effects of magic on the setting. If there are a lot of experts around, then all sorts of social elements will change – medicine, transport, warfare, farming, industry and much else may be very different from any historical society we know of. However, power will be distributed – a large 'magician class' could support a fairly democratic setup, or they could form a feudal aristocracy. On the other hand, a small number of adepts would have less influence on the structure of society, which could look much like some historical period – but that handful of experts could be powerful, perhaps acting as the traditional court magicians.

Frequency also interacts with mind-set. If magicians tend to club together to share ideas, the number of colleges will be proportional to the number of potential students. If magicians are megalomaniac and rare, they will probably fall into the 'dark lord' pattern, each carving out his own kingdom. If they are power-crazed but common, this will lead to a dangerous society, which may in turn drive 'normals' to develop anti-magical defences and take up persecution with a natural sense of self-righteous justification.

How to treat magicians

Having decided how magic wielders fit into your gameworld, the next thing to do is decide how they fit into your game. The more special their position, the more care may be required.

If they have a very specific image, such as tower-dwelling megalomaniacs or eccentric academics, it will usually be necessary either to treat them purely as NPCs, or to make them the focus of the game, perhaps with all PCs being magic wielders. The original version of Chaosium's *Pendragon* epitomised the former approach – all PCs were knights, and magicians were unusual NPC encounters who resembled forces of nature. *Ars Magica* is based round the latter philosophy – PC magicians are powerful, egocentric scholars, and although it's possible to play their servants, friends and guards, such characters have to accept that they are in a subsidiary position. On the other hand, classic RPGs such as *AD&D* reflect the idea that Magic Users, although sometimes powerful, are socially on a par with members of other professions, enabling mixed PC groups to operate as equal partnerships.

Games where spell-casters are always NPCs have the advantage of using these characters as interesting complications in PCs' lives. Adventurers must seek to deal with them and work around their oddities. Conversely, if most or all PCs are spell-casters, they will probably have to struggle to adjust to this bizarre lifestyle. This can either represent a fun, high-power game if the PCs are socially and magically strong, or a tense struggle for survival if they are weaker and perhaps persecuted. Games with cranky, powerful magicians can also have complex political plots and sub-plots.

Standard games' mechanics may need a little tweaking to fit a given world, but not necessarily too much. Spell-caster PCs may have to be started at a higher level or points total than the norm, and they may have to take some extra features as standard, such as 'Hunted' or 'Reputation' Disadvantages, specific social skills and status, and so on. If you or the rules you are using insist that magicians must have worked their way up through lower levels of power, then you may have to fit in some social institutions, such as colleges where trainee wizards stay safely out of the way, accumulating experience towards the day they strike out as independent experts.

Whether you use magic rules based on lists of fixed spells or more flexible ideas of improvised magic or 'reality shaping' is a matter of taste. Spell lists are easier, but if you want to make your spell-casters powerful, their lists may grow rather long and unwieldy, making more flexible, improvised systems more worthwhile. Some games allow a combination of both styles of magic, which may be a little more complex, but which generally makes for maximum flexibility.

It's worth putting some thought into the system and optional rules you use in a game in which magic is to play a special role, and this is one area where rules can have a huge influence on the flavour of play. It may even be worth designing some new rules of your own, although this can be a lengthy process and tricky to get right. One interesting idea might be to adapt a trading card game such as, say, *Magic: The Gathering,* to serve as a magic system, in conjunction with a regular set of RPG rules for everything else.

"It's worth putting some thought into the system and optional rules you use in a game in which magic is to play a special role."

magical defenders and monster-hunters, much as in, say, *Call of Cthulhu.*

The big question with such a campaign is how magic can be controlled. If society hates and fears it, and the persecutors won't use it, then how can magicians be stopped? Perhaps there are paladins whose training and iron will-power makes them partly immune to magic, or perhaps the persecution is partly carried out by a religious group whose priests can work miracles that are not considered magical, but which can counteract magical power.

Before running a witch hunt campaign, a referee must, of course, determine that the players are interested. Many gamers may well find the idea very interesting, because they get to struggle against overwhelming odds while wielding neat powers. (Or, if they are the hunters, they get to fight bizarre evil in a good cause.) Others, however, may prefer less harsh moral contrast in their games; most players don't mind their characters facing tough opposition, but many like to be able to feel safe at least some of the time. Do note that it's perfectly possible to introduce a few solitary, slightly crazy magic-haters (or renegade mages) into other sorts of campaigns, allowing for 'hunters and hunted' plots as an occasional change of pace rather than a central theme.

GURPS MATERIAL

GURPS is well supplied with supplements that could be very useful for 'secret masters' campaigns, especially in modern-day settings. *GURPS Mage: The Ascension* and *GURPS Voodoo* both deal directly with the idea, and *GURPS Illuminati* and many others are also relevant.

Secret masters

On the other hand, perhaps magicians actually run the world, but think that doing so publicly would have disadvantages – it might, say, tend to inspire the sort of persecution discussed above. So they organise to set themselves up behind the scenes, as string-pullers and secret rulers of the universe.

This, then, is a setting for paranoids, conspiracy freaks, and those who love political back-stabbing plots. If the PCs are magicians, they have to find a place in the power structure – but they could be resistance fighters or investigators, working to expose the machinations of the magical conspiracy. This idea is also flexible in that it can be used as the basis for a campaign set in the modern world or real history – the setting is unchanged, despite the presence of magic, because magic is a secret.

Inspiration for this sort of campaign can be found in a wide range of sources, many of them horror or dark fantasy. The idea of secretive, powerful beings controlling the world is pretty sinister, especially if magic should involve a lot of dark forces.

Alternatively, it could be pitched as more of an espionage game, where the sinister Blofeld/Goldfinger-style arch-villains happen to have weird abilities. However, such a game doesn't have to be overwhelmingly dark or dangerous – there's also scope for a certain amount of oddball humour or even social satire, especially if the setting is apparently the real world. If things are run by wizards, why is the world the way it is? Is television really a system for draining mental energy into their great spells? Is the political system controlled by a junior mage with a warped sense of humour? And what is the dark secret of the Aussie soaps?

Mad academics

But would wizards necessarily want to be in charge? After all, they may well be able to fill all their material needs by fairly simple magic, and perhaps their studies are so absorbing that they wouldn't really have time for boring stuff such as ruling the world.

So magicians might operate as mad scientists or eccentric scholars. This idea, in various forms, appears everywhere from the RPG *Ars Magica* to many of Terry Pratchett's books. It's not entirely compatible with highly action-oriented styles of plot, unless the scholar-wizards are kept in the background as NPC encounters and advisors, but it can make for some entertaining stories.

Scholar-wizards tend to be depicted as archetypal unworldly academics. They can almost become caricatures, even in a fairly serious setting, because they combine vast knowledge of the universe and control over reality with an unwillingness to do much that's useful. But the joke can be turned back on itself if the unworldly magician suddenly proves willing and able to demonstrate vast powers, and much of the interest of a game can be in deciding what it will take to make a magician come down from the ivory tower and start flaunting power.

Of course, it may be stretching things to assume that all magicians would think exactly the same way; more likely, some renegades or 'crass materialists' would insist that magic should be used, and regularly. So what would keep them in line?

There are several possible answers here, for example, there might be 'compacts' agreed and enforced by powerful magicians, who would stop 'idiots' from rocking the boat. Or there may be more subtle social pressures, or perhaps just the sheer difficulty of combining magical study with any other occupation. For that matter, if spells always require hours of totally distracting work to cast, magic isn't going to be overly useful for purposes of violence.

Game plots can come from such questions, or campaigns might be based on the pursuit of weird lore, or the need to fight some overwhelming supernatural evil that only these mad scholars can handle. This type of world lends itself to the use of magicians for comic relief. Many of Pratchett's books use this idea, but he didn't invent it – the point about both humour and magic is that they tend to mess about with normal ideas of reality.

SUPERHEROIC POWERS

If wizards are powerful and good in combat, and either use their powers for personal advantage or to defend the population, a gameworld could come out rather like a superhero campaign. In this case, the obvious rules to use are something like Hero Games' *Champions*.

Towers of power

Lastly, and perhaps most fun of all, how about a setting where wizards are really allowed to enjoy themselves? One in which their power is unmatched, and hence they rule the world – at least so far as they can be bothered. This is a slightly under-used style of fantasy/sword-and-sorcery setting – one built around individualistic, powerful wizard characters, who spend most of their time working with bizarre and powerful magic.

The primary reference points for this are, of course, Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* stories (particularly those in the anthology, *Rhialto the Marvellous).* However, there's more to the topic than roleplaying in the Dying Earth, fun though that might be. For example, consider the previously-mentioned successful CCG. Its mages are so powerful that they would surely dominate their world. I imagine each of them setting up a gothic tower, while everybody else huddles below, trying to dodge the demented enchantments that the wizards hurl around so carelessly. Another example of the 'loonies in towers' approach is Terry Pratchett's *Sorcery;* even Tolkien's Saruman could be interpreted as an example of a wizard reverting to the true nature of the breed, and taking to his tower and to megalomania.

"A wizard who disintegrates an entire town in a fit of petulance can be played as funny, but it's no joke for the town concerned."

AD&D MAGIC

The *AD&D* supplements mostly treat spell-casters as an accepted part of society, rather than focusing on some special role that they might play, but there are some exceptions. The world-wrecking powers of the *Dark Sun* setting are a good example.

There are various options to note for campaigns using this idea. PCs might be full-powered wizards, playing complex power games, or they could be lesser magicians on the way up (an interesting but dangerous position). Alternatively, they could be non-magicians, who regard the magicians as a fact of life to be worked around, or even rebelled against (very dangerous, but satisfying if you win). As with the 'academic wizard' approach, this concept permits humour, although it may be a little dark and even brutal; a wizard who disintegrates an entire town in a fit of petulance can be played as funny, but it's no joke for the town concerned.

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Dice games and expansions

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Roleplaying Systems

Board Games, Miniature Systems

The Scores

Everything reviewed in arcane gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

10/10
Perfect. There's simply nothing better.

9/10
Excellent, a classic. Highly recommended.

8/10
Very good, with few problems. Recommended.

7/10
Good, but not exceptional.

6/10
Above average, but not without problems.

5/10
Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

4/10
Below average, but not without merit.

3/10
Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

2/10
Very poor, should be avoided.

1/10
Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

the gaming magazine arcane reviews THIS MONTH

Ars Magica on page 60

The highly regarded RPG of medieval magicians is back in a new edition from Atlas Games – and it's better than ever.

Magestorm!

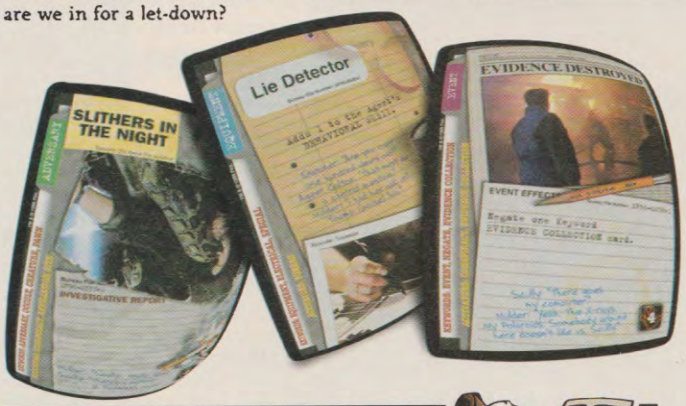
TSR expands the options available in its *Dragon Dice* collectable dice game with a whole range of magical artifacts, extra terrain, a new race and more.

Witchcraft

More magicians, but this time the setting is a darker version of our own modern world, plagued by supernatural forces that threaten the very future of humanity.

The X-Files CCG

The hottest license in the world? Probably. But have NXT Games and US Playing Cards done justice to our favourite TV show, or are we in for a let-down?



arcane SEAL OF APPROVAL

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

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ARS Mag
4th Edition

It's time to get medieval...

LOOK FAMILIAR?
Ars Magica and *Vampire* have certain ideas in common – the 12 houses of Hermes recall the bloodlines of the Kindred, and the rules of the Masquerade bare more than a passing resemblance to the Hermetic Code. Hardly surprising given that *Ars Magica* was the first creation of *World of Darkness* guru Mark Rein•Hagan (in collaboration with Jonathan 'Everway' Tweet).

Ars Magica is a special game. It was not the first to deal with magic, and it is far from being the only one set in Medieval Europe. What makes it so special is that – for almost the first time – the magic feels really magical and the Middle Ages feel truly medieval.

The game focuses on the Order of Hermes, a (fictitious) society of wizards – or 'magi' as they are called – that stretches across Europe. Magi are expected to abide by the Code of Hermes, which prohibits them from dealing with demons or molesting fairies, and forbids them killing another magus without a damned good reason. Members of the Order generally live together in small communities where they can pursue their arcane studies without distractions from the mundane world. These communities – somewhere between monasteries, universities and the Wizards Tower of fantasy tradition – are known as 'covenants'. Nearly all campaigns centre on one such covenant.

Although all magi have studied the Hermetic tradition of magic, and although they are committed to the same basic principles, there is plenty of scope for individuality within the order. Bonisagus, the Order's founder, had 12 followers all of whom taught their particular styles of magic to their apprentices. These apprentices also had apprentices, and so the Twelve Houses of Hermes were born. Members of House Bjonaer are closely associated with animals, while House Flambeau magicians specialise in fire magic. Players choose a house at the character generation stage, and this helps to define what skills and spells they start with.

Speaking of spells... As you'd expect, an awful lot of space in the rulebook is dedicated to magic rules.

It's a kinda magic...

Hermetic magic is, of course, entirely fictitious, but a lot of the ideas behind it are firmly routed in medieval cosmology. The basic rule is that what learned people in the Middle Ages *believed* to be true, *is* true in the world of *Ars Magica*. So 'fire' is not the phenomenon understood by modern physics, but one of the elements, midway between inert matter and a living being. A magician casting a 'creation' spell is momentarily contacting the world of Perfect Forms which the philosopher Plato wrote about. And magic is limited by the workings of the pre-Copernican universe (which, as the game reminds us, are not arbitrary rules, but facts about the way the universe works – in the same way that gravity or the speed of light are facts about our universe).

The medieval world is surrounded by seven concentric crystal spheres, the first of which is called the Lunar Sphere. Anything above this first sphere is part of God's jurisdiction, and therefore absolutely fixed and unchangeable. It follows that the most powerful magi in the world couldn't stop the sun from rising, or alter time. And because the soul is a gift from God, they can't change people's true nature, create human life or raise the dead. These details aren't going to come into most scenarios, but it's good to have a game which reveals depths and possibilities to players and referees who want to read around the subject.

gica

"What makes it so special is that the magic feels really magical and the Middle Ages feel truly medieval."

Each magus learns five magical 'techniques' and ten magical 'forms': the techniques are what you can do, and the forms are what you can do it to. So the Creo technique is the power of creation; and the Ignem form deals with fire – hence, a 'creo ignem' spell would refer to the creation of fire. (Latin was the universal language of educated people in the Middle Ages, so it makes sense for the game to contain a fair smattering of these Latin terms.) A low magnitude 'creo ignem' might be used to light a candle – a high level one could call down vast sheets of flames in unnatural shapes. Magicians can put forms and techniques together to produce ad hoc spontaneous magic, or they can learn pre-set spells with wonderfully evocative names such as 'Blade of the virulent flame' and 'Arc of fiery ribbons'.

So, you're a magician, you live in a covenant, you are affiliated to a house, and you know hermetic magic. What do you actually do all day? Well, you probably aren't interested in adventures in the traditional RPG sense. You'd rather stay in your laboratory, reading and writing books, learning and researching new spells, creating magic items, training apprentices. 'Adventures' deal with the interruptions to this routine – the relatively rare occasions when the wizards have to venture out of their studies to track down some ingredient, or when there is a serious magical danger to be averted. They often focus on politics of the covenant or of the Order of Hermes itself.

Magi are strange, individualistic people – so how do you assemble a group of them into an adventuring party? The answer is that you don't. *Ars Magica* pioneered the concept of 'troupe' play. Each player generates, not one, but three player characters – one 'magus', one 'companion', and at least one 'grog'. A 'companion' is a non-magical PC who is associated with the covenant. He could be a noble who has befriended it, a disillusioned monk who is living there, or maybe a scholar who lacks The Gift but wishes to study. A grog, on the other hand, is one of the people who actually do the ordinary work around the place – a guard, a cook or a sentry, for example. In any given adventure perhaps only one player would get to play his magus, while the others play companions and grogs.

The game further suggests that everyone should take a turn at refereeing, and should work together to create the covenant where it all happens. Troupe play is certainly ambitious and different, but it can produce a real feeling of collaboration and participation – the whole playing group comes to think of it as 'their' campaign.

Too often, games which are set in the medieval period seem to think that the Middle Ages were just like the modern world, only without central heating. *Ars Magica*, on the other hand, is the fruit of solid research into the history of the period. The book deftly tackles complicated subjects such as medieval economics (coins were not quite the same things then that they are now) and the medieval academic world (the theory of Authorities and the Seven Liberal Arts) without ever once sounding like a textbook. We are even gently introduced to some of the religious debates of the time – the Cathar heresy and the Albigensain crusade. Although this is not really a background book, there is enough information for any referee to start to create a game routed in history. Speaking as the proud holder of an MA in Medieval Literature, I have to say I'm bloody impressed.

Ars Magica has been through a lot of mutations since its first edition in 1988. The third edition, published by White Wolf games, darkened the tone appreciably, in a rather unconvincing attempt to link the game to the World of Darkness. This fourth edition is closer in style to the original version, and thus, arguably, closer to the original spirit of the game. In particular, the ridiculous 'aura of reason' (which suggested that magic didn't work if you didn't believe in it, utterly contradicting the whole medieval feel of the game) has been exorcised. But what strikes me most about this new edition is its immense clarity. It really is a pleasure to read, and a model of how to explain fairly complex rules to a new player. This is undoubtedly one new edition that has been well worth waiting for.

VITAL INFO

title:	*Ars Magica 4th Edition*
system:	a roleplaying game
price:	£TBA
publisher:	Atlas Games
	001 612 638 0098
released:	January 1997
e-mail:	AtlasGames@aol.com

And the players said...

Sam: "Thank goodness they've toned down the sodding demons."

Rob: "I like a game you can get stuck into. This is it."

Steve: "You really need a campaign to do it justice – if you don't mind, I'll stick to one-offs."

Also available...

There are two other classic games set in the Middle Ages – Chaosium's *Pendragon* and FGU's fondly-remembered *Chivalry & Sorcery*. White Wolf's *Mage* focuses on modern-day magicians, and there's always *AD&D* and *GURPS: Magic* if you want something a bit more traditional. There's also *that* card game, the name of which I just can't quite remember at present...

The Final Verdict

"Literate, cerebral, thoughtful, intelligent, with its roots firmly planted in medieval history and philosophy. If the subject matter interests you, then *Ars Magica* could be the basis of the most in-depth campaign you've ever played. A classic reborn."

Andrew Rilstone

Score 9/10

BattleTech

SATURATION BOMBING
Command
CONTRACT WITH GRAY DEATH LEGION
Command • Unique • Mercenary • Inner Sphere
WOLF'S DRAGOONS PILOT
Command • Mercenary • Inner Sphere
Pilot: +2 initiative, +1 attack
"Dragoon pilots are so good because we prefer spending money on training instead of death benefits."
–Colonel Jaime Wolf, Wolf's Dragoons, Outreach, 19 Dec 3049
+1

GARFIELD INTERVIEW There's a rather cracking interview with Richard Garfield available in **arcane** 2, see back issues on page 53.

In the 31st century, they'll find a *BattleTech* deck buried somewhere and wonder what the blithering hell we were on about.

Everybody seems to play *BattleTech* at least once. You're walking around a convention and you see some people deeply absorbed in moving robot miniatures around an embarrassingly model railway-like plaster landscape. You stop and look. Three hours later and you're Commander Kiri-Amou or somesuch of the Wolf Clan, crushing the enemy beneath your mechanised feet. You've forgotten where you are and what time you're supposed to meet your friends in the bar, and there's a distinct possibility of your bladder imminently bursting. And that's because you're having fun, and enjoying one of *the* really distinctive games in the world. And for some people, this chance encounter becomes a lifetime obsession. Not for me, I have to confess, but for several of my friends. There's nothing quite like *BattleTech*, you see. Until now, that is.

Now there's *BattleTech*, the card game. Designed by no less an alumni of the game designers' guild than Richard *'Magic: The Gathering'* Garfield, the man who has designed the single most popular card game of the late 20th century and made himself a fortune too. The man who, not content with that, then went on to design *Netrunner*, probably the *best* card game of the late 20th century. And the man who found time to squeeze out *Roborally*, *Vampire: TES* and *The Great Dalmuti* too. So, one of the great games meets one of the great designers for a reworking. And the result is a little disappointing.

It may be because in trying to turn *BattleTech* into a card game there's an element of trying to reinvent the wheel. What's the point of taking an extraordinarily good game and changing it into another kind of game? Well, if we were talking about a computer conversion here we wouldn't think it odd, and indeed there are two excellent

ON-LINE GAMING Wizards has an on-line version of *BattleTech* that you can access from its Web site at `http://www.wizards.com/BattleTech/DCMS/Welcome.html`

"The way that Garfield has taken the hugely combat-oriented *BattleTech* and deepened the strategy level of play is quite wonderful."

SUPPORT: LOGISTICS
Command • Resource
Logistics (If you have Logistics in play, you may restock a card from your hand at end of your turn)
"A military force is nothing without merchants willing to risk their assets for the good of the war effort."
–Prince Hanse Davion, Outreach, 20 Jan 3051
SUPPORT: POLITICS
Command • Resource
"Communication is inarguably the lifeblood of the army."
–General Morgan Hasek-Davion
SUPPORT: TACTICS
Command • Resource
Tactics (If you have Tactics in play, add +1 to your initiative)
"I was awarded my bloodname before your parents left their sibko."
–Natasha Kerensky, Clan Wolf
SUPPORT: MUNITIONS
Command • Resource
Munitions (If you have Munitions in play and you roll a 3 on a missile roll, that missile volley deals 3 damage)
"The hell with information–ammunition is ammunition!"
–Patch McGuire, tech, 1st Somerset Strikers

Turn, turn, turn

In traditional arcane style, here's a quick run-down of a single turn in *BattleTech*, so that you get an idea of how it works.

1. Untap phase: All 'tapped' (ie those used last turn) cards are untapped.
2. Draw Phase: Draw two cards.
3. Repair/Reload phase: Mechs that suffered damage can be repaired.
4. Deploy phase: You can bring two cards into play, these are either Sites that provide resources to build things with, or Mechs, Pilots or Equipment which are put in a Construction Zone.
5. Missions phase: You can attack one of your opponent's Sites (including his Construction Zone and his Stockpile, or cards yet to be drawn) or move Mechs to guard one of your own Sites. Doing this causes the attacking Mech(s) to tap. You can repeat this phase as often as you want, providing you have untapped Mechs. If your opponent blocks your Mechs, he has to tap the blockers. There is a variety of Mission Cards that can influence events here.
6. End of Turn: Any completed Mechs in the Construction Zone are moved out and into play.

The game is won when a player has no cards left in his Stockpile. When an opponent attacks your Stockpile, you lose cards equal to the damage done.

Anatomy of a Mech

CARD NAME Self-explanatory, really.

CONSTRUCTION COST The amount of resources needed to put this card into play. These can be accumulated over several turns. The numbers next to letters refer to the *extra* cost you must pay if you don't have a Site of the appropriate type in play. (A is Assembly, M is Munitions and so on.)

SPEED Mechs are either Fast, Medium or Slow. Mechs can only block Mechs that are as slow or slower than they are, unless they've been assigned to guard a specific site.

ATTACK VALUE The amount of damage your Mech does in battle.

ARMOUR/STRUCTURE The first number is the Armour of your Mech, the second its Structure. Any damage that goes over the Armour number stays with the Mech until it is repaired. If the Structure value is exceeded, the Mech is destroyed.

VITAL INFO

title:	*BattleTech*
system:	a card game
price:	60-card starter deck £6.75 15-card booster pack £2.20
publisher:	Wizards of the Coast
	0345 125599
released:	out now
e-mail:	uk@wizards.com
web site:	http://wotc.ukonline.co.uk/

And the players said...

paul: "I'm sorry, but I found it long-winded and dull."

Andy: "If you have the patience for it, this is an extremely subtle and clever game."

Liam: "It's good, but it's too slow and complex to be great."

Also available...

BattleTech shares elements with all of Richard Garfield's other card games: *Magic: The Gathering*, *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* and *Netrunner*.

The Final Verdict

"Not one of Richard Garfield's best games, this is over-reliant on previous successes and not any better than the original *BattleTech*. It's still jolly clever, though, and good fun to play."

Steve Faragher

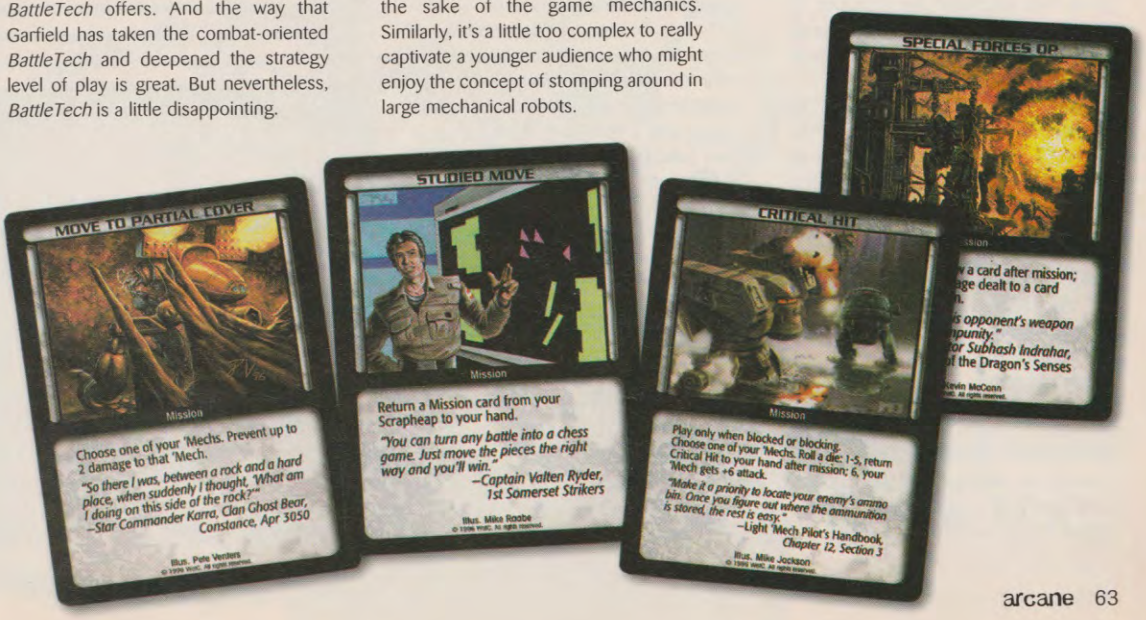
Score 7/10

BattleTech conversions in the *MechWarrior* series, that do take the game to interesting new heights because of the graphics they offer. It's quite a revelation to see those giant mechs come to life on a computer screen. But in the case of the card game, there's less atmosphere than there is in the original. This is the game reduced to two, static dimensions.

The second reason that this is a bit disappointing is that it's all a bit too familiar to fans of Richard's card games. There are five kinds of Sites in the game – Munitions, Assembly, Logistics, Politics and Tactics – and they function rather like the colours in *Magic*, except that they make playing certain cards *cheaper* rather than being required to play them. Then there's the Construction Sites, where you assemble Mechs and other cards by placing resource tokens on them, rather like Data Forts in *Netrunner*. There are cards such as the Catapult Mech (pictured on the right) which act the same way as a Prodigal Sorcerer in *Magic*. There are Fast Mechs which can't be blocked when attacking, rather like flying creatures in *Magic*. And so forth, with more examples than I care to mention here. And I think that's a bit of a shame, because I've always enjoyed new concepts in games as much as the games themselves. New rules and new ways of approaching the mechanics of game design are half the pleasure of any new game, and *BattleTech* sadly has precious few of these.

All of this is not to say that *BattleTech's* a poor game. Far from it. It's a fine game with some wonderful elements. As with all good CCGs, it wasn't until I started putting a deck together for the first time that I started to see the large range of possibilities *BattleTech* offers. And the way that Garfield has taken the combat-oriented *BattleTech* and deepened the strategy level of play is great. But nevertheless, *BattleTech* is a little disappointing.

And you can't help wondering just who's going to buy it. *BattleTech* fiends should probably carry on playing the game they've always loved, and there's not really enough here to attract hardened card gamers to try this one out just for the sake of the game mechanics. Similarly, it's a little too complex to really captivate a younger audience who might enjoy the concept of stomping around in large mechanical robots.


MOVE TO PARTIAL COVER
Mission
Choose one of your 'Mechs. Prevent up to 2 damage to that 'Mech.
"So there I was, between a rock and a hard place, when suddenly I thought, 'What am I doing on this side of the rock?'"
–Star Commander Karra, Clan Ghost Bear, Constance, Apr 3050
Illus. Pete Venters
STUDIED MOVE
Mission
Return a Mission card from your Scrapheap to your hand.
"You can turn any battle into a chess game. Just move the pieces the right way and you'll win."
–Captain Valten Ryder, 1st Somerset Strikers
Illus. Mike Raabe
CRITICAL HIT
Mission
Play only when blocked or blocking. Choose one of your 'Mechs. Roll a die: 1-5, return Critical Hit to your hand after mission; 6, your 'Mech gets +6 attack.
"Make it a priority to locate your enemy's ammo bin. Once you figure out where the ammunition is stored, the rest is easy."
–Light 'Mech Pilot's Handbook, Chapter 12, Section 3
Illus. Mike Jackson
SPECIAL FORCES OP
Illus. Kevin McConn

IT'S ONLY A GAME Obviously aware of the bad press that RPGs are getting from certain groups, *Witchcraft* is careful to make the point that it is, after all, only a game. It then proceeds to feature a large pentagram on every page, which may be somewhat self-defeating...

BACKING IT UP Myrmidon Press already has a line of supplements for *Witchcraft* in the works, the first of which is the *Mystery Codex*, which will feature more background, new Covenants and powers, as well as new character types.

Witchcraft

In a world threatened by unimaginable powers, where only those few gifted with supernatural abilities stand between us and destruction...

Some games are truly great, and some are just frighteningly poor. Most, of course, hover somewhere between these two extremes. *Witchcraft*, the new roleplaying game from Myrmidon Press, is one of the later. It's a shame, because it has so much going for it. All the game lacks is one vital element.

Designed by veteran author CJ Carella, whose credits include several books for Steve Jackson Games and Palladium, *Witchcraft* is set in a darker version of our own world. Although on the surface everything is the same, in the world of *Witchcraft* the supernatural exists, and its power is growing.

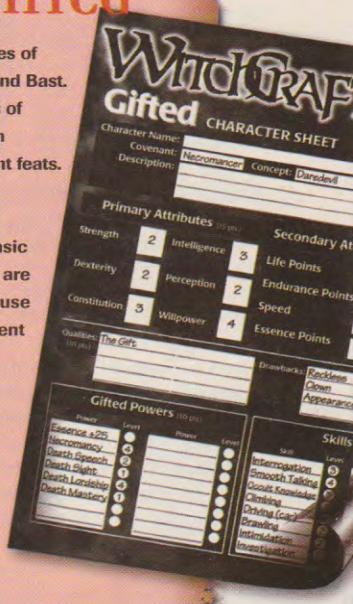
A time of Reckoning is approaching, and with every passing day the dark forces and evil powers that threaten humanity grow in number and strength. Mankind's only chance lies with the Gifted, those few humans with supernatural abilities of their own. Throughout history they have been feared and hated for their power, often hunted down and killed, but never completely eradicated – only forced to practice their arts in secret. Now, as the Reckoning approaches, more Gifted are being born than ever before.

In *Witchcraft*, the players take on the roles of the Gifted or their allies, and join the struggle against the malign forces, both supernatural and mundane, that threaten the world's future.

The *Witchcraft* rules are well written, and the whole 224-page book is very well designed and put together, with a high standard of artwork throughout. It begins with a fictional piece that does a very good job of creating an interesting and appealing atmosphere for the game, then moves on to an in-depth introduction to the setting and background which clearly and concisely explains the important concepts which it revolves around. Following this are six large chapters. 'Roles' deals with character generation, 'The Game' explains the game system, 'A Walk in the Night' explores the setting and background in more detail and depth, 'The Wise Craft' looks at the four Arts available to player characters (see the 'Powers of the Gifted' box), 'The Supernatural' describes the various

powers of the gifted

Players of *Witchcraft* can choose from four main types of character to play – Gifted, Lesser Gifted, Mundane and Bast. All but Mundanes are able to use one or more forms of supernatural power, known as Arts. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, and is capable of different feats.

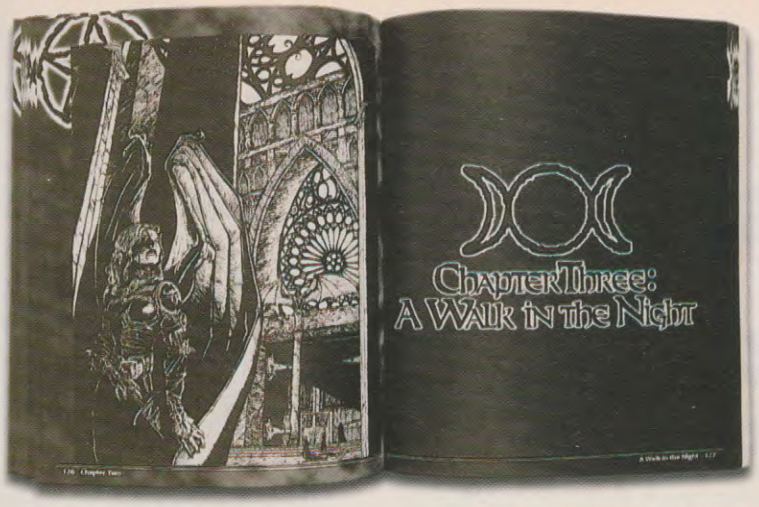


MAGIC **The most flexible of the Arts, Magic involves channelling and shaping Essence – the basic stuff of reality, from which both matter and energy are made – by the force of the magician's will. Mages use a number of different Invocations to focus their intent and produce the desired effect.**

THE SIGHT **Similar in some ways to Magic, the Sight is the collective term for a number of psychic abilities. Seers can read and influence or control the thoughts of others, communicate telepathically, move things, create heat, heal wounds and even kill, all with the immense power of their minds.**

NECROMANCY **Despite the negative connotations that the term conjures up in most people's minds, Necromancy in *Witchcraft* is not an inherently evil Art. Necromancers can communicate with and control the spirits of the dead, make use of the spirit's knowledge and skills, and gain power over the very forces of life and death.**

DIVINE INSPIRATION **Those whose faith in their God is nearly unshakeable can gain the ability to perform miracles. Although no-one knows whether these abilities are actually granted by a 'supreme being' or whether the Inspired simply channel their own power through their belief, they still work.**



creatures and forces that the players might encounter, and 'The Play is the Thing' discusses running the game itself.

Witchcraft uses the rather grandly titled Unisystem rules. Characters are rated by Attributes, Skills, Qualities (special advantages), Drawbacks (which give you more points to spend) and Gifted Powers. Players begin character generation by choosing what basic type of character to play – Gifted, Lesser Gifted, Mundane or Bast (feline shape-shifters) – each of which receives a different number of points to spend on the various categories. Gifted characters, for example, receive lots of points to spend on supernatural powers, while Mundane PCs have more to spend on Attributes and Skills, to balance their lack of special abilities.

During play, tasks can be resolved in a number of ways depending on the style and taste of the referee. As a default, the Unisystem is based around rolling a D10, adding the relevant Skill and Attribute together with modifiers for difficulty. If the result is 9 or more, the character succeeds, the higher the roll, the greater the success level. Although the back cover blurb proudly trumpets the fact that the rules can also be used with cards or be completely 'story-driven' (ie. diceless), this is simply a matter of using a deck of playing cards to generate the random number between 1 and 10, or having the referee make judgement calls based on the value of the relevant skills and abilities. Workable, but hardly groundbreaking.

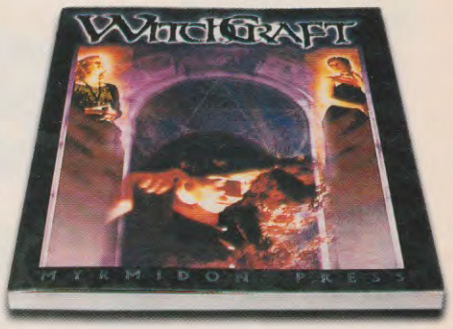
So, what you have with *Witchcraft* is a high-quality game that's been well written and impressively realised, together with a simple but effective game system and some nice ideas. So far, so good. What's missing, though, is that vital spark of originality that lifts a good game to the level of a great game.

As anyone who's played any of the *World of Darkness* games from White Wolf may have begun to suspect, *Witchcraft's* setting bears more than a passing resemblance to it. Basically, it's *Mage: The Ascension* with a little touch of *Call of Cthulhu* thrown in. The Gifted are organised into Covenants of like-minded people, which are the equivalent of the Traditions in *Mage*. Likewise, the magic system revolves around manipulating Essence, the elemental stuff of which both matter and energy are formed, the equivalent of Quintessence. There are even rules which limit the ability of Magic to be used in the presence of crowds (although the justification is slightly different), and a mysterious conspiracy that seems to be controlling the world, referred to as the Combine – a less concrete version of the Technocracy.

That's not to say that *Witchcraft* is a straight copy of *Mage*, by any means. It's a simpler game, for a start, and doesn't involve the same degree of potentially pretentious philosophy. Likewise, supernatural powers are split into four different Arts in *Witchcraft* (see 'Powers of the Gifted' on the left), and the system for using each is simpler than *Mage's* often complex rules. The atmosphere is also different – *Witchcraft* is based more on real folklore and mythology – and the game is more 'directed' than *Mage*, which is ambiguous and flexible. In *Witchcraft* it's easier to sort the goodies from the baddies, and the players are assumed to be 'fighting the good fight', which makes it a simpler game to run and much easier to plan campaigns.

However, the similarities are certainly strong enough for you to end up with a sense that *Witchcraft* just doesn't really offer anything new. Don't get me wrong, this is a finely produced and solid system with few problems in terms of rules or background, and has a couple of excellent ideas. If you like the sound of *Mage* but are put off by its complexity, you'll probably have a great time playing *Witchcraft*. Similarly, if *Call of Cthulhu* appeals, but you want a game in which the player characters have the power to face up to their foes, this could be just the ticket. Unfortunately, though, *Witchcraft* lacks that single 'brilliant idea' that would have transformed it into a genuinely excellent game. As it is this is certainly good stuff, but not great.

"*Witchcraft* lacks that single 'brilliant idea' that would have transformed it into a genuinely excellent game. As it is this is good stuff, but not great."



VITAL INFO

title: *Witchcraft*

system: a roleplaying game

price: £14.95

publisher: Myrmidon Press

001 313 393 5401

released: out now

e-mail: CJCarella@AOL.com

web site: http://www.sforge.myrmidon.com

And the players said...

paul: "I enjoyed *Witchcraft* a great deal – it's simple, fun and interesting to play."

ian: "Give me *Mage* any day. *Witchcraft's* just too derivative for my liking."

steve: "Despite the continuous sense of déjà vu in *Witchcraft*, this is not a bad game."

Also available...

Well, the obvious choice would be *Mage: The Ascension*, which is very similar but more complex and original than *Witchcraft*, or any of the other *World of Darkness* games from White Wolf. *Chill*, *Kult*, *Nephilim*, *Don't Look Back* and *Call of Cthulhu* are also good modern horror games. For a slightly different slant on the genre, you could always give *Conspiracy X* a try, which is from New Millennium Entertainment.

The Final Verdict

"Well written, well designed, and well put-together, *Witchcraft* is a good, solid modern-day horror system that's easy to get into and fun to play. Unfortunately, it just doesn't offer anything particularly new or original to the genre."

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

The X-Files Collectable Card Game

The truth is out there — but can you find it in time?

Without a doubt, *The X-Files* is one of the hottest licenses around. The current popularity of the show virtually guarantees that anything with Mulder, Scully, or *The X-Files* logo on it is going to be noticed at the very least – and hopefully fly off the shelves.

As such, it seems that US Playing Cards and NXT Games (which actually designed this game) have succeeded in something of a coup by signing up the rights to a CCG based on the show. Of course, the truly hardcore 'x-philes' are probably going to rush out in their droves and buy it simply for the pictures. But how good a game is it? Well, it's quite good, but not exceptional.

There are two ways to play *The X-Files,* Basic and Advanced, but in both the aim is to discover the identity of your opponent's X-File, while preventing them from discovering the identity of yours.

Before each game both players choose a team of agents and an X-File. As well as Mulder and Scully themselves, the game includes cards representing just about every supporting character that's appeared in the show, including regulars such as Assistant Director Skinner and the double-agent Krycek, as well as a number of one-off characters. The X-File cards represent the 'baddie' of each show, including individuals, secret projects and so on.

Players begin by splitting their playing area into three sections – the Bureau, the Field and the Hospital. Each player's Agents begin the game in their Bureau, and the X-File card is placed to one side, face down. The game then progresses in turns. On each of their turns a player may move their agents between the sections of the playing area and issue them with Equipment cards, then play a Site card into the Field. Any Agents in the Field may then investigate the card.

Each Site card represents one of the locations from the show, and lists both a Prerequisite and a Question. To successfully investigate a Site, the total of the Agents' skill levels must beat that detailed by the Prerequisite – so, to successfully investigate a Site with the Prerequisite 'Computer 4+', the total of the Computer skills of the Agents sent to it must be 4 or higher.

To aid the Agents, the player can play Event and Witness cards – any equipment previously assigned to an Agent may also help. To protect the identity of their X-File, the opponent can play Event, Bluff and Adversary cards. Adversary cards attack the Agents, and can also force them to go to the Hospital to heal.

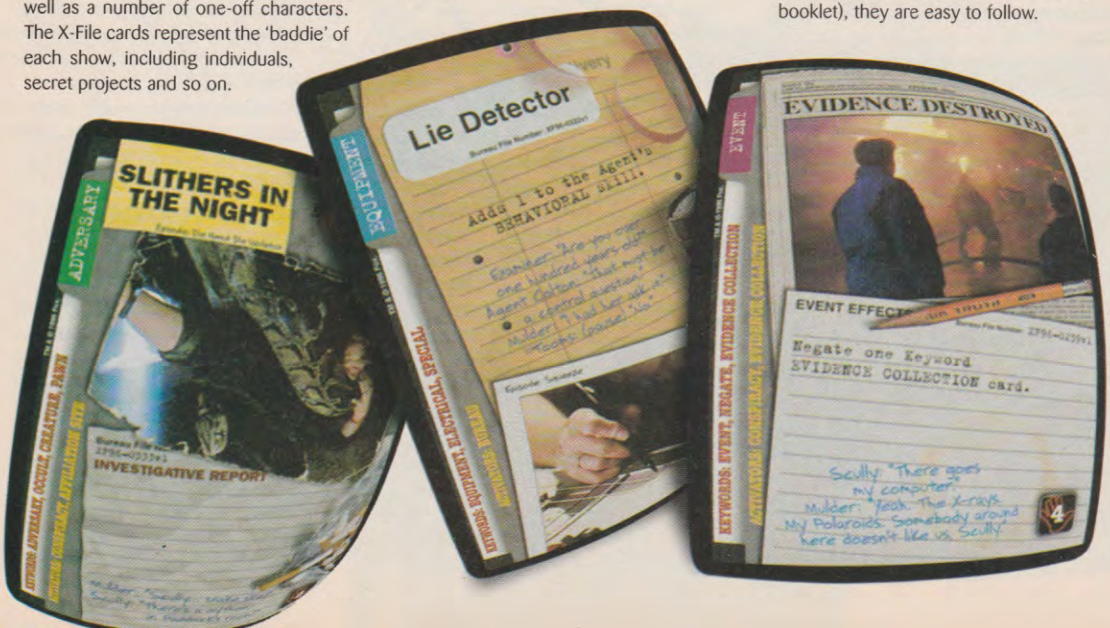
If, once both the current player and their opponent have played all their relevant cards, the skill check succeeds, the player may ask their opponent a question about their X-File, as determined by the Site card. Each X-File is defined by four characteristics (Affiliation, Motive, Method and Result) each of which can be one of five possibilities. For instance, an X-File's Affiliation may be Government, Alien, Evolutionary, Primordial or Occult.

Each starter deck comes with a complete list of all the X-Files in the game and their characteristics. By investigating the correct Site cards and asking questions, you gradually eliminate possibilities until you can work out the identity of your opponent's X-File.

The Advanced rules add several new rules, including paying for cards with Resource Points (for cards that help your Agents) and Conspiracy Points (for cards that help protect your X-File).

As you've probably noticed, then, *The X-Files CCG* is, at its heart, a slightly more complex version of games such as Cluedo and Mastermind. This is no bad thing and is well suited to the style of the show. Likewise the cards are of fairly good quality, and well presented. All the illustrations take the form of stills from the show, varying in quality from excellent to average, but all are easily recognisable. The rules are well written, and although they look intimidating (one 36-page booklet and one 68-page booklet), they are easy to follow.

"It can be a fun game to play. However, it could have been better simply by cutting down on the complexity."



The truth is here

Here's an example of one player's cards during a game of the advanced version of *The X-Files CCG*. The playing area is split into three sections – below is the Bureau, which contains the draw and discard piles and the player's Resource points. Agent Skinner is currently assigned to this section. The middle section of the playing area is the Field. Agents Krycek and Scully have been assigned here. On the right is the Hospital section, where an Agent is recovering from his wounds (the counters on his card). Next to the Hospital is the player's X-File card, and his pool of Conspiracy points.

Agents Krycek and Scully are investigating a Site card. The card requires that the Agents have a total Evidence Collection skill of 4 or more, and allows the player to ask one Result question...

What lets the game down, though, is the details. Or rather, that there are too many. Basically, *The X-Files CCG* is too complicated for no good reason. This shows up most on the cards themselves – the text is always too small to be easily read during play, because each card has to contain so much information. In addition, many cards are very hard to bring into play, requiring a set of conditions to be met.

This problem is exasperated by the dual nature of the game. The cards that you play to uncover your opponent's X-File are dependent only on each other, so it's a matter of tailoring your deck to the group of Agents you've picked. However, the cards you play to obstruct your opponent are keyed to their cards. Because you don't know in advance which cards the opponent is using, it's hard to design this aspect of a deck.

Another problem lies with the X-File cards. Some can be identified with only two correct questions, while others require three – making some X-Files easier to identify, and thus useless.

There's nothing inherently wrong with the basic concept of *The X-Files CCG*, and it can be an interesting and fun game to play. However, it could have been a better game by cutting down on the complexity and making the cards easier to bring into play. A degree of detail is important in a game trying to recreate the atmosphere of the show, but too much makes things confusing.

The game would probably have benefited greatly if one player controlled the Agents and another controlled the X-File, in a similar fashion to *Netrunner*. This would have made deck design much simpler, and also made the game easier to play – rather than having to try to perform both tasks, you'd only have to worry about one at a time.

...In an attempt to protect his X-File, the opponent plays Sleep Deprivation, which reduces Krycek's skills by 1, reducing the skill total to 3. To counter this, the player brings in a witness, who boosts the Evidence Collection skill by one, bringing the total back up to 4, enough to successfully investigate the Site. In a final attempt to foil the agents, the opponent plays an Adversary card, which will attack Krycek and Scully. If both can survive the fight without being sent to the Hospital, the player will be able to ask their question about the X-File's Result.

VITAL INFO

title:	*The X-Files Collectable Card Game*
system:	a collectable card game
price:	60-card starter deck £7.99 15-card booster pack £2.50
publisher:	US Playing Cards/ NXT Games
	01252 26116 (Esdevium)
released:	out now
e-mail:	nxtgames@cts.com
web site:	http://www.nxtgames.com

and the players said...

steve: "There's a good, strategy-orientated card game in here – but it's been weighed down by too much detail."

paul: "What's the point in having so many cards that are almost impossible to play?"

em: "*X-Files* fans will love the cards, but the game is disappointing."

also available...

Cluedo and Mastermind are both, at their cores, similar games, and Cluedo especially is just as much fun, if not more. There are also many similarities between this and *Middle-earth: The Wizards* from ICE.

The Final Verdict

"An interesting idea let down by too much detail and not enough gameplay. *The X-Files Collectable Card Game* could have been a great game, as well as a great license. As it is, though, it's merely average."

Andy Butcher

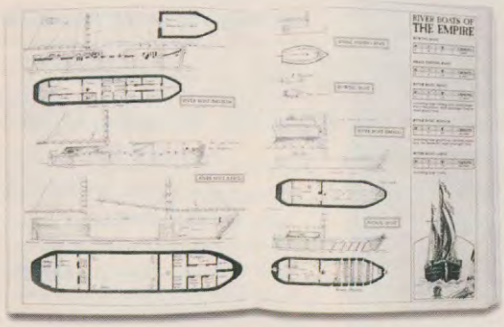
Score 6/10

Death on the Reik

there's a rotten stench coming from an ancient ancestral home, and it's not because the inhabitants were killed nine years ago already.

This is not a new release, not as such. *Death on the Reik* first appeared almost a decade ago, back when Games Workshop was still releasing a steady flow of roleplaying games and supplements. This effort, the third part in *The Enemy Within* campaign, originally came boxed, with an 88-page scenario booklet, a 32-page campaign booklet on running scenarios based on river-life (as in barges and narrowboats), as well as player-handouts and maps.

This Hogshead edition has lumped the whole lot together in a large soft-covered book, with the maps and handouts stuck in the back for you to cut out (and the 'main' full-colour map gently fixed to the inside-back cover). This is a reasonable compromise, because the handouts can be photocopied without breaking the spine.



The plot of the adventure continues where the previous installment – *Shadows Over Bogenhafen* – left off. The player characters are likely to be hunting down some of the key characters they met through that last adventure, though inevitably they'll be sidetracked along the way, and embroiled into the plot of the Cult of the Purple Hand to overthrow the Empire.

But there's a lot more than that going on in this mammoth scenario. For the main thrust of the plot here involves a piece of Warpstone that crashed to the ground from the skies over 100 years ago, and the attempts that a band of Skaven are making to recover it. This leads the PCs to a strange old home in a barren area of the Empire, where a ruined family live, guarding ancient secrets, and the clue which leads them on to Middenheim for the next scenario in the series.

I'm in the fortunate position here of reviewing a scenario that I've run the entire way through (this is rarely possible – reviewed scenarios are always read through and played to some extent, but when trying to meet monthly deadlines, a scenario that stretches out for months of play cannot be played through completely). The level of detail of which *Death on the Reik* can boast is impressive – even if the player characters pick up on just half of it, they're going to be able to appreciate that this is a finely-crafted adventure. The depth of the plot, the characters which are there to be met, and the glorious locations make this one of the finest adventures you're ever likely to run or play – rarely are scenarios that you buy as good as the ones you write yourself, but in this instance, you're going to be awestruck by the sheer quality of what's been put together.

Death on the Reik is close to getting a ten out of ten, but there's one thing that's stopping me from giving it – the next installment in the series, *The Power Behind the Throne*, is even better. If only adventures were being written as well as this a decade on…

Paul Pettengale Score 9/10

VITAL INFO

A campaign scenario for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*
£11.95
Hogshead Publishing
0181 673 6340
Out now
wfrp@hogshead.demon.co.uk

A Guide to the Astral Plane

The problem with *Planescape* is that it inspires an almost ceaseless tide of high-quality accessories, and such creativity puts a strain on both the finances and campaigns of referees. *The Guide to the Astral Plane* further exacerbates this problem.

The Guide breathes life into what had hitherto been little more than a planar motorway. Essentially infinite and filled with few 'solid locations' or indigenous species, the Astral Plane should by rights be a dull place. Yet with some deft imaginative touches and sleight of logic, the guide transforms this dead zone into a wonderfully different 'world'.

By expanding the accepted 'physics' of the Astral plane and applying classic *Planescape* thinking, the Silver Void is made solid and comprehensible. Rules for astral travel, zero-gravity combat and spellcasting are crisply and clearly explained – all concepts that will add extra spice to normal play and properly emphasise the unique nature of this inner space.

For these rules to have any practical value, though, the Astral Plane has to be worth exploring. And for that it needs people and places. The mid-section of the guide's response is more information than even an Illithid would want on the Githyanki – the indigenous species on the Astral. Such depth is necessary because it's suggested as an optional player race, but while as non-player characters the Githyanki boast some excellent twists and Astral-specific spells, as PCs they would be little more than dextrous, not to mention ugly, egg layers.

The final section of the guide deals with those other beasties who make the void their home and the few areas that actually 'exist'. Many of the monsters have been met before in other *Planescape* sourcebooks, but the locations are excellent, original work – the Bonecloud (a zombie swarm) and Divinity Leech (a fortress that sucks energy from the corpses of gods) take the bizarre nature of this plane to its logical extreme. All of the locations are dutifully different and the majority are truly inspired, so they're well worth running the void for.

Trenton Webb Score 8/10

A Guide to the Astral Plane
An *AD&D Planescape* accessory
£9.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Nightbane World Book Two: Nightlands

A nasty place to visit and you certainly wouldn't want to live there. This supplement lets you take a *Nightbane* campaign into the harsh, warped plane that is a parallel to contemporary Earth, but is inhabited by monsters and mindless doppelgängers, and ruled by the Nightlords.

The Nightlords' cities are twisted parodies of real cities where the rivers run with lava, skyscrapers are adorned with gargoyles and the main business is trade in human suffering and death. A number of suggestions as to why the two planes are inverse images of each other are given, but the choice of which is correct is left to the referee.

The plots, schemes and goals of the major players in the Nightlords' war against mankind are also covered in considerable depth, along with details of their power bases, allies, enemies, strengths and weaknesses in both worlds. Equal space is given to the humans, nightbane and other beings who have travelled to the twilight realms by accident or design, and the ways in which they avoid or fight the Nightlord menace.

Horror games in general seem to be getting more graphic, gruesome and perverse at the moment, and this supplement is at the head of the trend. It's very atmospheric, with ample scenario suggestions at the end of most chapters. There is a lot of variety, whether your style of game is maximum carnage or personal horror. It also strikes an excellent balance between explaining what is really going on while leaving key elements deliberately undefined, letting refs decide themselves and preventing others from learning secrets that players were not meant to know.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 8/10

Nightbane World Book Two: Nightlands
A sourcebook for *Nightbane*
£9.99
Palladium Books Inc.
001 313 946 2900
Out now

Havens of the Great Bay

The number and variety of domains for players to control in *Birthright* is huge, and *Havens of the Great Bay* is another collection of them. The realms of Brechtur surrounding the great bay of Cerilia are home to a variety of races – elves, dwarves and the independent Brechts. The domains presented include all the races, and a number of them capture the imagination – Drachenward, home to no less than four Cerilian Dragons, and awnshegh realms such as that controlled by the Vampire,

Havens of the Great Bay
A boxed expansion for *AD&D Birthright*
£14.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

the Hag and the schizophrenic Banshegh to mention but a brief selection of them.

But apart from yet more domains, does *Havens* offer anything of real value to the game?

Well, a new player character, The Guilder, is presented together with two new Domain actions, and the war cards are of a good strength and variety – this is about it, however.

To get the most out of *Havens of the Great Bay*, the *Blood Enemies* supplement will have to be used as an accompaniment because a number of references are made to it. In addition either *Cities of the Sun* or *Naval Battle Rules* (**arcane** 12) will need to be handy for reference because the sea plays an important role in each realm.

If you want to collect each box-set to hold details on the entire *Birthright* world then go ahead. It's not a bad expansion, though the quality of artwork on the handouts is a little varied.

Otherwise I recommend you read about the Brechts from the campaign setting box-set, and buy a selection of the Player's Secrets series which will doubtless follow.

David Cornford Score 7/10

Blood & Magic

Blood & Magic
A computer strategy game for the PC
£44.99
Interplay
01628 423666
Out now

The first of Interplay's computer games inspired by TSR's *AD&D* roleplaying system, *Blood & Magic* is a real-time strategy game set in a previously uncharted area of the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting.

The story goes that a fleet of ships was blown off course, and ended up discovering a strange new continent. Although there were some small tribes of people living there, this new land was largely empty, and overflowing with resources. The nobles in the fleet decided to stay and claim the lands as their own.

Warfare in this land revolves around the powerful magic of the Blood Forges, ancient magical items with the power to create vast armies of loyal followers for their users. Players use their Blood Forge to create Basal Golems, which can either generate mystical energy to power the forge, explore the land and fight, or be transformed into a

number of more powerful units. The game features five pre-generated campaigns of three missions each, or the option to play a random campaign over all 15 maps.

Blood & Magic is a fairly easy game to pick up, and plays like a simplified version of *Warcraft 2* or *Command & Conquer*. Everything works in a logical fashion, and there's enough variety in the available units and the individual battles to keep you playing for some time.

However, it doesn't really offer anything new. If you've played any other real-time strategy games, you'll have seen much of this before, and to be honest, it simply isn't as involving or as much fun as *Warcraft 2*. In addition, its links to *AD&D* are tenuous at best – most of the units featured appear in *AD&D*, but their strengths and weaknesses are different, as is the combat system. *Blood & Magic* does what it does in an effective and playable manner, but it simply doesn't offer enough to be a great game. There's nothing really wrong with it, but there's nothing that makes it stand out, either.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

Doors to the Unknown

Doors to the Unknown
An *AD&D Planescape* adventure
£7.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

In the early '70s there was a spate of low-budget multi-story horror films where four people were thrown together to tell their tales in turn. *Doors to the Unknown* borrows this format and suffers from the nagging suspicion – the creators had loads of good ideas but no great ones.

The premise for this mini-campaign is that there are four 'blink portals' that appear in Sigil every 500 years and which last for two months. After this the portals disappear for another half-millennium. The overall aim is for the party to probe these portals and find out the dark secrets behind them. And with rumours that these doors lead to restricted planes, of hyper-real super-monsters, and that they were created by the god Aoskar when the Lady of Pain killed him, dark it is.

The challenges are classic *Planescape*: find the keys to the portals, dive through, do a deed and get back. An extra gulp factor is added with the fact that these portals kill non-key holders, and that after exactly two months they close for another 500 years – so if you're not back by then it's game over.

Each of the portals leads to a unique mini-plane that poses specific challenges, three of which are good fun. The universe's junkyard, a hyper-real jungle and future-world of Logicus Prime all provide very different takes on 'standard weird planes'. Even the dull cave crawl that forms the fourth plane is spiced up considerably with a healthy dose of backstabbing intrigue.

The overall plot that is supposed to fuel the whole campaign doesn't really have the narrative cohesion that's required, though. Players who are going to have other things on their mind – such as getting back home – aren't given enough clues or guidance.

The vagaries of *Planescape* are one of its true blessings, because it enables games to be played in a fast 'n' loose style, which is why it's imperative that recognisable core themes are maintained, and why *Doors to the Unknown* fails. It serves up four mini-adventures which fail to coalesce into the single great adventure it wants to be.

Trenton Webb Score 6/10

Magestorm!

can you do without the biggest expansion yet for *Dragon Dice*?

Despite what you may have heard, *Magestorm!* is not actually a stand-alone *Dragon Dice* expansion. The 21 random dice are intended solely as enhancements for your current *Dragon Dice* armies, enlarging them with magic items, artifacts and Dragonkin.

These dice are in the form of solid colour D10s, D6s and D4s (rather like the terrain colours of regular *Dragon Dice*). Artifacts (D10s) like monsters, have an ID icon which counts as 4 points of whatever is required, and have a variety of other 4 point icons with special abilities depending on the rarity, or in the case of magic, the colour, of the die. The 4-sided dice (magic items) are certainly eye-catching (I mean it, be careful of the points) because they are nothing like the usual pyramidal shapes. They are elongated door wedges of single colour, and, apart from the largest of the three, contain only one type of icon. The larger die also has one of five 'special action' icons unique to *Magestorm!* dice.

Each army unit can hold one Artifact or Magic Item, but remember that the cost of these to your army building is the same as troop units, namely 1, 2, 3 or 4 points, so although you can strengthen your army's resolve and fighting capacity, you will also lessen its number. Magic Items and Artifacts count towards points totals, but do not actually fight or take damage. If you lose a unit under any circumstances and you do not have enough or the right type of unit left, any unusable Magic Items or Artifacts are lost immediately, thus although first glance makes *Magestorm!* magic appear powerful, it must be used carefully and in a balanced army.

The six-sided dice are Dragonkin, a new race that can be summoned into play by spending magic points. For every three points of regular troops in your army you can have one additional point of Dragonkin, and once they are in play Dragonkin act like any other unit. Their value is that they don't cost army building units and thus a 24 point army can, with calculating use of magic, become a 32 point army.

There is one other type of die in the *Magestorm!* set and these are the Minor Terrain 8-siders. These are coloured in the same coding as regular *Dragon Dice* terrains, and can only be placed in areas of similar type to themselves. Every time the player who brings the Minor Terrain into play wins a manoeuvres roll in that area, they can choose not to turn the terrain die, but instead roll the Minor Terrain and hope for one of its advantage abilities. This is a bit like Russian Roulette because there are some icons which, if they land face up, cause the owning player's army severe discomfort, but the rewards definitely warrant taking the chance.

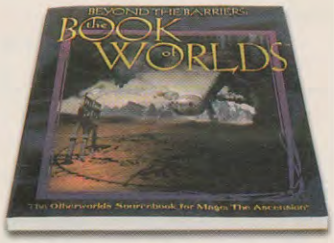
Magestorm! is an excellent product and of gaming value to all *Dragon Dice* players, embellishing whatever racial or inter-racial army they possess.

Chris Baylis Score 9/10

VITAL INFO
An expansion set for *Dragon Dice*
£9.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds

A tourist's guide to Umbrae, Horizon Realms and other extra-dimensional oddities.



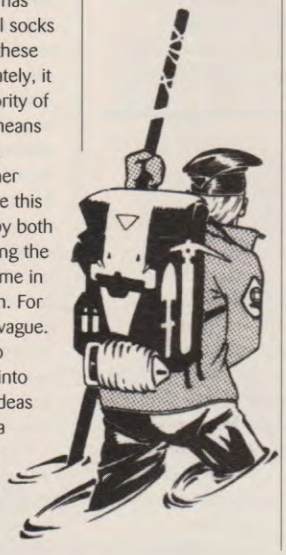
VITAL INFO

A sourcebook for *Mage: The Ascension*
£12.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now
http://www.white-wolf.com

If there's one thing that is guaranteed to drive *Mage* players insane, it's trying to make sense of all the otherworlds that litter the game's cosmology. There's the three Umbrae, the Horizon Realms, the shard and shade realms and so on. And just to make things worse, you have to work out how these fit in with *Vampire's* astral plane, *Werewolf's* Velvet Shadow, *Wraith's* Shadowlands... I could go on.

Thankfully, White Wolf has finally pulled its cosmological socks up and compiled a guide to these mysterious places. Unfortunately, it has chosen to write the majority of the book in-character. This means that you only get suggestion, possibility and innuendo rather than hard facts. Some will like this – it makes the book usable by both players and referees, providing the referee is willing to put the time in to define his or her own truth. For others it will be frustratingly vague.

The book does itself no favours by plunging straight into the High Umbra, a realm of ideas made incarnate. If you want a conversation with the colour lilac, this is the place for you. It is, though, the most difficult to comprehend.



From there onwards we have a roller-coaster ride through the Middle Umbra, familiar to *Werewolf* players, the Low Umbra, haunt of Wraiths, a few other oddities, such as the Mirror Zone and the Dreaming, and then to the Horizon Realms. From there it's into space with the Magickal aspects of the planets and moons, and finally to the horrors that live deep outside our solar system, just waiting for a passing Mage to serve as a canape.

All of the rules – those few that there are, this is White Wolf, after all – are gathered together in a single chapter at the back of the book. This makes a pleasant change from having them buried somewhere in the reams of background material presented.

It is difficult to see exactly who *The Book of Worlds* is aimed at. The in-character narration implies players, but then it is also the only viable resource for storytellers. Across these pages are more ideas than any *Mage* storyteller will ever be able to use, and as a creative wellspring it is a roaring success. It certainly broadens the scope of *Mage* further than anything yet produced. But so many of the ideas are only painted with such broad brushstrokes and so little detail that many hours' work will have to go into them before they are usable in a campaign. I would not be surprised to see this become a foundation stone on which other supplements are built.

Is this book a good idea? Yes. Is it an ambitious idea? Yes. Is it successful? Only partially.

Adam Tinworth Score 6/10

World Builder's Guildbook

World Builder's Guidebook
A supplement for *AD&D*
£14.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

At one time or another I would wager everyone reading **arcane** has thought wistfully of designing their own roleplaying game. For most of us that is as far as it ever gets – but if you've actually sat down to map out your lands it can suddenly all seem rather daunting. But fear not, *The World Builder's Guidebook* is a methodical step-by-step guide to creating your own fantasy setting to use in an *AD&D* universe.

And, what's more, it's good. Better than that, it's excellent, from the shape and size of your world to the climate and racial cultures present, and even further to the ecology and mythology of your land. All can be found here presented in a format that's easy to read and with countless random roll tables.

A selection of blank maps are also included, ranging from drawing a world overview to separate regions and individual kingdoms.

The volume begins by highlighting various approaches to world creation, explaining the merits of each and detailing how to use the book for any you decide to choose.

Some might think that world creation is a personal thing, and that a book like this takes an element of fun out of its creation. Not so. Yes there are countless pointers and pushes in the right direction, but the option to disregard any and all information that doesn't fit in with your theme is repeated throughout.

The World Builder's Guidebook is either a good reference tool for reminding you of the bits that you've left out, or a comprehensive world creating machine that is easily followed.

David Comford Score 9/10

Oblivion

There seems something contradictory about the idea of live-action ghosts, but that's exactly what this rulebook hopes to offer you. *Oblivion* brings the underworld of *Wraith: The Oblivion* into White Wolf's Mind's Eye Theatre live-action roleplaying rules system. This already established system is largely a matter of taste. To those used to the free-form, virtually systemless live-action roleplaying common in the UK, it will seem restrictive and, in places, silly. To those who are making the move from tabletop games, it's easy to pick up.

Oblivion
A live-action roleplaying system
£10.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

But it's in the transfer from tabletop to live-action that the game suffers. It finds no easy way to simulate dead guys walking through walls, so it has to fudge the issue. Likewise some of the wraithly magic, arcanoi, have to be deemed referee-only because they cannot be easily transferred into the LARP game.

While there is little to quibble with in the execution of the game – the writing is top notch, the art is evocative and plenty of practical guidance is given for the novice – the basic premise is what undermines it. The world of *Wraith* just does not translate easily to a live-action setting. While a really experienced group could probably carry it off successfully, too many compromises and fudges have to be made. There's potential in here, and much that's usable. But in the end, the level of work placed on the referees to make this in any way an enjoyable, realistic experience for any sized group may prove unsustainable.

Adam Tinworth Score 5/10

How the Mighty are Fallen

How the Mighty are Fallen is the first adventure to be used with the *Netheril: Empire of Magic* boxed set (also reviewed this issue – see page 76). Designed for characters of 11th-14th level you would expect it to be tough. It is.

How the Mighty are Fallen
An adventure for *AD&D Forgotten Realms*
£7.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Set within the Shadowed age of Netheril, the adventure takes players through a series of plots and encounters pitting them against among others the Tarrasque, an undead army and a golden dragon – forcing characters to use quick thinking almost as much as their reflexes. Players get the chance to search for the lost Nether Scrolls and even to collect the components to Karsuss' final spell – one which will result in the death of a god.

The main adventure is excellently planned, and hooks into a variety of side-encounters are well laid throughout, so that a wrong turn here or a decision not to follow a NPC there results in a variety of smaller adventures instead of the entire volume falling on its face.

The adventure works equally well whether you decide to play native Netherenese characters or present day characters. No details are given on the events leading up to the

modern characters' decision to time travel back to Netheril, but there are countless reasons why players should want to, ranging from mere nostalgia to somebody willing to pay for the knowledge they will return with.

Good plot lines are well compiled with an abundance of useful maps. If you are thinking of buying *Netheril: Empire of Magic* then give this a good look because it's an excellent introductory adventure for the fabled kingdom.

David Cornford Score 8/10

Dino Hunt

Dinosaurs have always been popular, and the success of *Jurassic Park* only underlined that fact. *Dino Hunt* from Steve Jackson Games stands out from most dinosaur games, though, in that a real effort has been made to make the game not only fun, but scientifically accurate – at least as far as the details of each dinosaur are concerned. So much so that the Dinosaur Society has given the game its seal of approval.

Dino Hunt can be played by two to four players, and the object of the game is to go back in time and capture dinosaurs, bringing them back for study and display in 'theme parks'. Each dinosaur is worth a certain number of points, and the player who gets the most points wins the game.

Dino Hunt
A card game
£24.95
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 447 7866
Out now

The game mechanics are very simple and easy to pick up, and make for a fun, if not particularly challenging game. Play proceeds in turns, with dinosaurs being drawn from the deck and placed in the relevant time zones. The current player can then move their 'capture team' from time period to time period, rolling dice and expending energy points to try to capture dinosaurs, aided by their own special cards and hindered by cards from other players.

Dino Hunt is definitely aimed at a younger audience than most of Steve Jackson's releases, and for anyone with children who love dinosaurs it would make a great gift, and one with a little more educational value than most games. The only problem is the cost – £25 is a lot of money for a game, even one with high quality components like these.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

Nemesis: The Greys Sourcebook

Just what are the mysterious Greys up to, and what do they want with Earth?

Of the three separate groups of aliens known to Aegis, the covert organisation to which characters in New Millennium Entertainment's superb *Conspiracy X* roleplaying game (**arcane** 7) belong, the most mysterious – and perhaps the most 'alien' – are the Greys. Despite being the most commonly sighted, seemingly responsible for the majority of abductions and experiments, little is know of this race, its motivations, its society or its technology.

Nemesis, the first sourcebook for *Conspiracy X*, exposes the truth behind all this and more, taking an in-depth look at every aspect of the Greys from their evolution to their current mission on Earth.

Unfortunately, reviewing a book like this – the contents of which are intended to be for the referee's eyes only – is always difficult without giving too much away. What can be said without a doubt, though, is that this is an intriguing and well-designed supplement for an intriguing and well-designed system.

Nemesis contains everything a referee might ever need to know about the Greys in order to use them in their games, organised in a logical and easy-to-follow structure. Best of all, the justification for the Greys' activities on Earth not only makes sense in terms of the game's background, but also introduces even more moral ambiguity into a game where few situations are as cut and dried as they may appear.

As with *Conspiracy X* itself, the key strength of *Nemesis* lies in the clever weaving of real life UFO reports and sightings, the assumptions made by popular media and the game's own unique background, to create a frighteningly plausible explanation of the Greys existence, powers and motivations. If you accept a couple of basic assumptions, everything else makes sense, and it's this that makes for truly enjoyable conspiracy games.

There are a couple of weaknesses in the book. None are likely to cause any problems during play, because it's unlikely your players will ever learn this much. One lies in the explanation of the Greys' evolution, where a couple of important points are skipped over with little explanation. Related to this is the rather poor justification for the Greys' reputation for timidity, in which a somewhat dubious distinction is drawn between physical and psychic violence. Without having much experience of psychic abilities it's hard to judge whether the distinction makes sense, but it doesn't feel right.

However, these are minor gripes compared with the overall quality of the book. The purpose of a sourcebook like this is to give the ref enough information to be able to incorporate the Greys into games in a consistent manner, and to provide inspiration for ways that the race can be used. On these counts, *Nemesis* is a great success – if New Millennium can maintain this standard for its forthcoming releases, *Conspiracy X* will have a very rosy future indeed.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

VITAL INFO

A sourcebook for *Conspiracy X*
£9.99
New Millennium Entertainment
001 518 459 3724
Out now
NMEGames@aol.com
http://www.wizvax.net/rmegames/conspiracyx/X.html

Children of the Night: Vampires

Vampires are skill, it's been proved! Since Bram's book and the first Nosferatu movie these creatures of the night have been the ultimate undead. In the mist-shrouded horror-world of *Ravenloft* vampires, under the guidance of Strahd, have even become a dominant power in the land.

Vampires, the first in the *Children of the Night* series, creates a host of bloodsuckers primarily for use in *Ravenloft*, but that will also function just fine in most other *AD&D* realms. Well, that's the aim – 13 ready-rolled princes (and princesses) of darkness who can drain your party at a moment's notice.

Children of the Night: Vampires
A sourcebook for *AD&D Ravenloft*
£9.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Each of this Bloodsucker's dozen is dutifully detailed to death with appearance, stats, background, personality and combat descriptions. This character sketch is further backed up with a mini-adventure/encounter intended to show off each star-vampire's foibles, strengths and weaknesses.

Yet for all the effort lavished on these monsters, their wildly different powers and complex personal histories, the devil doesn't dwell in the detail. Somehow they fail to spark the imagination quite the way they should. Some of the creations work, but the majority feel little more than premeditated twists on the 'standard' vampire types. And in the mould of *Interview with the Vampire*, too many are whinging vampire apologists who are suffering "an unbearable curseä", and who after each and every feeding "wail loudly".

The fearful Lady Adeline and darkly comic Jack Bequick are finely developed vampiric characters, but too many of the Children of the Night lack bite. Within a *Ravenloft* setting there will be enough other horror cues, and players will be sufficiently used to dealing with 'different' vampires to run with the ball, but outsiders – who are used to caped counts with pointy teeth – may have some trouble.

Trenton Webb Score 5/10

The Sabbat

If you thought the Camarilla was nasty, you haven't seen anything yet.

Perhaps inspired by the success of the stand-alone expansions for *Magic: The Gathering*, *The Sabbat* is the first 'stand-alone' release from Wizards of the Coast for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*. Whereas *V:TES* features all of the clans, important figures and vicious politics of the society of vampires known as the Camarilla, *The Sabbat* takes a look at the far less civilised society of the same name.

VITAL INFO

A stand-alone expansion set for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*
28-card booster packs
£2.75
Wizards of the Coast
0345 125599
Out now
uk@wizards.com
http://wotc.ukonline.co.uk

The vampires of the Camarilla follow strict rules designed to prevent humanity from discovering their existence – the so-called 'Masquerade' – and struggle to control the darker sides of their natures, clinging to what little humanity they have left. Those of the Sabbat, however, reject these principles, revelling in their bestial natures and succumbing to their most depraved urges. The two groups have waged a vicious war for mastery of the night ever since their formation, and the hatred each holds for the other is fearsome.

The Sabbat expansion enables you to introduce this dark brotherhood of vampires into your games of *V:TES*, or to pit groups of Sabbat against each other. The set features twisted 'antitribu' versions of seven of the clans of the Camarilla, together with three new clans, and three new disciplines. The new clans are the Lasombra, the self-styled elite of the Sabbat who use their powers to manipulate others, the Tzimisce, descended from the vampire lords who once ruled Eastern Europe, and the Pander, the Sabbat version of the Caitiff, who have won respect for themselves. The new disciplines are Dementation, the power to induce madness, Obtenebration, the power to control shadows, and Vicissitude, the power to sculpt living flesh.

The Sabbat is being sold in 28-card 'super' boosters, each of which contains a rules update describing these new clans and powers, as well as some unique differences between the Sabbat and the Camarilla, and suggestions on playing games with both types of vampire. This does mean, however, that the game isn't truly 'stand alone', because you need a copy of the *Vampire: TES* rules to play.

As you might expect, the cards feature a similar mix to *V:TES*, although many of the *Sabbat* versions are darker in theme or style. The set is made up of over 400 cards, so there are a lot to choose from.

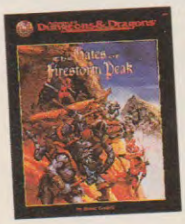
The Sabbat is a welcome addition to *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*. There's something just a little more satisfying about pitting the Sabbat against the Camarilla, and many of the new cards capture the atmosphere of White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* roleplaying game (on which *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* is based) perfectly. *V:TES* was already a dark, brooding game with a lot of vicious backstabbing and nasty politics – with *The Sabbat* it's even darker.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

The Gates of Firestorm Peak

Deep within a mountain, many moons ago, the Elder Elves carved out a portal that enabled them to explore strange new worlds and boldly go where no demi-human had gone before. Powered by the Dragon's Tear, a comet on a 27-year cycle, the elves managed to connect directly into an alternate reality. The elves have now gone but the link remains intact and, with the return of the comet, a whole world of alien nastiness is about to spill out on to our doorstep.

This strong, if a little *Stargatey*, premise would normally be enough to justify an adventure module. And it would be worthy of note for its solid design, varied structure and high-quality supplementary artwork. Yet what really makes *Firestorm Peak* different is that it's designed to be used with both the standard *and* Player's Option *AD&D* rules.



The Gates of Firestorm Peak
An *AD&D* Player's Option adventure
£11.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Now while the Player's Option series undoubtedly refined a woefully inadequate combat system and cleaned up spell casting, it did introduce a cartload of new rules too. And although each of these new rules was clearly explained in isolation, seeing them all in practice is an absolute must if you're to grasp the full impact of the system. As the first 'showcase' supplement for the system, *Firestorm Peak* does an excellent job.

With the simple addition of **● Player's Option Consideration** comments at the end of each description or encounter, referees can see where the standard and Player's Option games differ. More importantly, these footnotes illustrate the extra depth that can be added to play if used well.

The Gates of Firestorm Peak is a totally playable, if somewhat long, adventure for all *AD&D* hackers. As a showcase for the Player's Option series, though, it works as both an illustrative guide to the new rules and an advert. Because if you haven't toyed with the new rules, you'll be wondering just why its players get some large-scale maps and cardboard cut-out pieces, but old-style *AD&D*ers don't.

Trenton Webb Score 9/10

The Shadow Court

Fascinating new unseelie Changelings, unseelie versions of kith, secrets of the unseelie noble houses, new backgrounds, bunks and Dark Arts can be found in *The Shadow Court*. It's an excellent supplement about the unseelie fae but, unfortunately, doesn't go into enough detail about the actual Shadow Court, an alliance that hides behind the Unseelie Court. The main rulebook entices its players with hints that, "Of late the Shadow Court is being turned to a sinister purpose, one that remains secret for now." It still is a well-kept secret, because this supplement doesn't explain it.

The Shadow Court
A sourcebook for *Changeling: The Dreaming*
£10.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

Where the book excels is in cleverly tying the unseelie fae into the traditional pagan cycle of seasonal festivals, beginning at Samhain (Halloween) and going through Yule, Imbolc, the Spring Equinox, Beltain, Midsummer, Lughnasa, the Autumn Equinox plus a few other celebrations such as Carnival.

The annual, ritual sacrifice of the king seems appropriate for these dark changelings. Samhain is given special importance as a time when all fae embrace their unseelie natures for one night of the year, though for some it is the start of a journey of self-discovery into the darker side of the character's nature – a traditional faerie tale hero's 'descent into the dark underworld'.

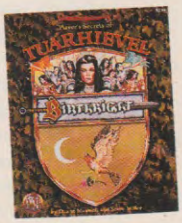
Production quality, artwork, style and the introductory fairy story are of the usual high standard of most *Changeling* material. A chapter on storytelling goes into the ways that unseelie chronicles and one-shot adventures can be developed, but a complete, fully fleshed-out scenario would have been a good addition.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 6/10

Player's Secrets of Tuarhievel

Due to the vast numbers of humans on Cerilia, the majority of the Player's Secrets series have focused away from the demi-human races. *The Player's Secrets of Tuarhievel*, however, opens up one of the most mysterious and intriguing races on the continent to both players and referees – the elves.

Player's Secrets of Tuarhievel
A supplement for *AD&D Birthright*
£4.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now



The once undisputed rulers of the continent, this magical race now harbours century-old animosity and dreams of poetic retribution from a dwindling forest refuge – bordered by encroaching humans and the fiery anger of the Gorgon.

Although presenting a hefty challenge for players and referees alike, this addition to the series is one of the best I have seen. It is quite simply an essential volume. A detailed history of relentless human exploitation of the once vast forests, and insubstantial treaties between the elves and the new settlers, opens a

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Teletext on Ch4 p621

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Netheril: Empire of Magic

ever dreamt of wielding magic to 12th level? TSR has just made it possible.

VITAL INFO

A boxed set for *AD&D Forgotten Realms*
£18.50
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Netheril was a kingdom formed by the union of seven fishing villages against marauding orc bands approximately 5,000 years ago (-3859 DR). With elven tutelage and the mysterious Nether Scrolls, Netheril quickly became near unrivalled in the use of magic – creating huge floating cities (enclaves), exploring Realmspace and at the fall stealing the power of the gods themselves.

This expansion to the Forgotten Realms enables campaigns to be staged in the kingdom. Players can reach Netheril either via time travel from the present day, or characters can be created during the Netherese period – either choice has excellent adventure possibilities.

The complexities of time travel and the ramifications of changing past events to effect the future has been clearly thought out, and is neatly side-stepped by only allowing travel to and from Netheril in one fashion. Spells from the *Chronomancer* supplement cannot access this area of time, the only means to travel is through the Time Conduit Spell created by Mystra, which only allows players to be in the past for one year. In addition anything the characters hold which is not available in the past simply vanishes to be returned when they journey home – equipment, memorised spells and most importantly spell use for priests. The pantheon of Netheril holds only ten deities, creating a major problem for the faithful who find their god absent. Likewise items from the past cannot be brought back to the present. Knowledge, however, can come home, and with 41st level arcanists wandering the land this could prove to be very precious.

The opportunity to create Netherese characters has been well structured too, with revised details on classes (none of the optional character kits from the complete books are accessible, among other changes), religion and equipment to reflect the differences in periods.

The most drastic change, though, is to spellcasting. Spellcasters are arcanists and do not memorise spells – they merely pluck them out of the weave. On reaching 20th level he/she can progress to learn 10th, 11th and 12th level spells. Perhaps the greatest change, though, is that there are no damage limits for spells. For example, a 30th level arcanist casting the magic missile spell creates 15 missiles each, inflicting 1D4+1 damage each.

An Encyclopaedia Arcana supplement is included giving information on major magical items and spells. Everything needed to play in Netheril can be found within this box-set including two lavishly-drawn maps depicting Netheril both at its height and fall.

Netheril is a great campaign expansion. Okay, so players might be put off a little at not being able to bring any mementos back from their travels, but with a little thought the adventure possibilities present can overcome this. If you're after new campaign ideas then this is highly recommended.

David Cornford Score 8/10

The Long Way Home

The Long Way Home
An adventure for *Traveller*
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BITS
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Although the recent changes at Imperium Games have meant that the company's release schedule has suffered some set-backs, the new edition of *Traveller* hasn't gone completely unsupported. The British Isle Traveller Support (BITS) organisation has just released this, its first supplement for the new system.

The Long Way Home sits somewhere between a long adventure and a mini-campaign in length, and is set in Milieu 0, at the start of the 3rd Imperium. The players take on the roles of the crew of a specially designed Scout vessel, and are sent on a secret reconnaissance mission far beyond the borders of the recently formed Sylean empire.

Included in the book are no less than nine linked scenarios, full deck plans and technical data on the players' ship, an Extended Duration Survey class scout called Lintula Sunrise, and maps and world data for 50 star systems.

Together with a little work from the referee, *The Long Way Home* forms one of the simplest yet most effective means of starting a *Traveller* campaign since the classic *Traveller Adventure* book. Everything you need to get the game started off and running for some time is included, and the adventures themselves are interesting and well designed, with some neat ideas and clever twists. The book offers several options for getting things started, including two possible lead-ins: one for Scout characters, and the other for independent explorers.

This is a promising first release for the new *Traveller*, and one that bodes well for any future books from BITS. Good stuff.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

Player's Secrets of Stjordvik

Player's Secrets of Stjordvik
A supplement for *AD&D Birthright*
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Stjordvik is another of those realms in political turmoil – though here it has more to do with a weak succession of rulers than any open rebellion. Your first task – should you choose to accept it – is to boot out a couple of jarls and, while basking in the applause from your subjects, tax them like they've never been taxed before to restore the neglected road system and the Great Oak wall – the only barrier between Rjuvik's raiders, the Blood Skull Barony and your recently acquired realm.

The Player's Secrets of Stjordvik is a good volume, but unfortunately nothing leaps out of the content and grabs you demanding to be taken in hand. Stjordvik is a land where internal division is threatening to give a fatal advantage to outside threats. And that's basically it.

A decent campaign could be staged if part of the realm has already been overrun, and the players have to restore the peace before turning to the squabbling jarls – but this is about as good as it gets. The idea of political division is not a new one, and there is nothing depicted here that any *Birthright* referee or player could not have thought of.

If this is to be your first domain, then it is a good starting point to gain experience as a regent – but if you are looking for a new domain with fresh challenges you will be disappointed, and would be well advised to buy some paper and a pen and devise your own domain.

David Cornford Score 4/10

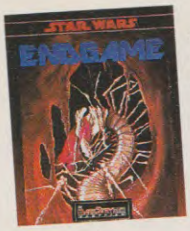
DarkStryder: Endgame

Don't even *think* about buying this supplement if you haven't played the previous scenarios in the series. *DarkStryder* is a linear campaign, with sourcebook that's screaming with gripping campaign scenarios.

The former ruler of Tuarhievel is being held by the Gorgon and, against all tradition, his human consort has ascended the Thorn Throne and been invested with his bloodline until her unborn child is of an age to rule. With many noble houses exhibiting a genocidal hatred of all humans, the political scene has escalated to assassination attempts and a nationwide struggle for dominance. If straight hands-in-the-dirt adventuring is more your style, then a domain decimated by a magical disaster – wandering spectres of those slain in the eternal border wars, and the looming presence of the conquesting Gorgon – provides enough material for a series of campaigns.

a beginning, a middle and an end. This volume is the end – which is not a very good place to start.

Assuming that you already know the crew of the FarStar and care whether or not they learn the Secret of DarkStryder, this book has good and bad points.



For a start, it really is epic. A massive space battle! Mighty starships crashing over ruined cities! A confrontation with a truly impressive alien! An insane villain! Ancient heroes waking from their thousand-year sleeps! Irritating furry aliens carrying spears!

It also ties the plot threads together into a satisfying conclusion, and the secret of DarkStryder is sufficiently interesting to make the extremely long, journey to discover it seem worthwhile.

DarkStryder: Endgame
A scenario for *Star Wars*
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On the other hand, it's even more pre-plotted than the previous volumes. Rebel reinforcements turn up and destroy an Imperial ship at a pre-scripted moment, and the referee has to keep certain characters alive no matter what. There's also a lot less emphasis on character interaction than before, and as such there's a danger that the major PCs might take a back seat to the 'special effects'. Perhaps most importantly, though, the sheer, massive, vaunting ambition of the campaign means that you would have to be a damned fine referee with some damned fine players to actually carry it off.

But if you did – if you played the whole thing right through – you might just find that you'd played in a RPG that felt more like *Star Wars* than the actual movies. You can take that as a recommendation.

Andrew Rilstone Score 8/10

Byzantium Secundus

Hanging around with the rich and powerful on the capital of the *Fading Suns* universe...

The first sourcebook for the *Fading Suns* science fiction roleplaying system (**arcane** 11) from Holistic Design, *Byzantium Secundus* explores the capital of the Known Worlds. The seat of the newly-crowned Emperor, Byzantium Secundus is a hotbed of political activity, where representatives of all the various factions vie for attention, each with their own schemes and agendas to advance.

After a prologue (another letter, similar to the one that begins the *Fading Suns* book itself) and an introduction, *Byzantium Secundus* is split into five separate chapters, an appendix and a map of the world itself. Each of the chapters in turn deals with a different aspect of the capital of humanity.

'History', unsurprisingly, examines the history of the planet, from when it was no more than a hiding place for the Sathraists, through its years as the centre of the Second Republic, to the present day. The next, equally obviously-titled chapter – 'Places' – looks at the geography of Byzantium Secundus, dealing with each of the island-continents in turn. The last of the background chapters, 'People', then details the 'movers and shakers' of the planet, including their personalities, goals, relevant game statistics and all manner of other important information. The chapter then closes with a look at some of the less politically powerful but no less interesting denizens of Byzantium Secundus, including some particularly unpleasant creatures that call the world their home.

The fourth chapter is where things start to hot up, because it describes some of the many conspiracies going on in the halls of power. As you might expect in a universe with so many power groups, *Byzantium Secundus* is rife with plots and schemes both benevolent and benign. Everyone has at least three agendas – what they claim to want, what they really want and their own personal plans – and enough are discussed here to give any referee a lot of ideas.

Chapter five, 'Dramas', builds on the background information and plot ideas given in the previous chapter to suggest a number of possible stories that referees could use to create a single adventure or a campaign.

Finally, the appendix features game information about the Imperial Eye, the Emperor's secretive intelligence service. As well as background and history, there are also suggestions for creating Imperial Eye player characters, opening up a whole new range of possible adventures and campaigns.

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Byzantium Secundus is a very promising start for the *Fading Suns* system. It manages to pack a lot of interesting and useful information into its 128 pages, and there's very little here that isn't useful in some way. In fact, rather than being padded out with relatively useless background detail, you get the feeling that the writers had trouble fitting everything in. Any referee will find a great number of good ideas and a lot of inspiration here – providing you have an interest in political-style adventures or campaigns.

In this lies the only downside to *Byzantium Secundus* – if you're not really interested in politics, the book becomes much less useful. As the introduction points out, referees should adjust the complexity and moral ambiguity of the world to suit their style of play. But if you want your *Fading Suns* games to be space operas, and so simplify the issues, a lot of this book is wasted. It's probably still worth getting, because enough of the background is relevant to the setting as a whole, but you'll probably find yourself skipping a lot of the detail.

Nevertheless, *Byzantium Secundus* is a well-written, interesting sourcebook for a game with a great deal of potential, and if you *do* want your *Fading Suns* games to concentrate on politics, it really is a must.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Monstrous Compendium Annual Volume Three

One thing that adventurers in an *AD&D* setting can safely count on is that they are never very far from being pounced on by some bizarre creature or another. The sheer number of hell-bent races makes you want to find an isolated tower, lock yourself in and start scribing Circle's of Protection.

Monstrous Compendium Annual Volume Three
A sourcebook for *AD&D*
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While players have good reasons to be paranoid, referees can grin with delight at the multitude of beasties available for them to tailor to existing campaigns.

This *Monstrous Compendium Annual* contains just such creatures drawn from the *AD&D* releases of 1995, adjusted to fit any *AD&D* campaign world.

The strength of the annual is that the contents are drawn from a variety of *AD&D* settings. Creatures from the TSR magazines, *Forgotten Realms, Birthright, Ravenloft, Dark Sun, Al-Quadim* and *Greyhawk* can be found giving referees access to monsters with abilities that otherwise might not have been thought of.

Are a few interesting ideas and cross-over scenarios worth over a tenner, though? Well, TSR has released such a stupefying amount of products to date that every referee should have a decent supply of challenging monsters available for them to use. If you don't, then have a flick through this for a few new ideas, but think twice before you buy it.

Volume three is a mixed bunch. Bar a few good entries it falls into a compilation of variations on a theme which, with a little time and imagination, most referees could come up with.

David Cornford Score 4/10

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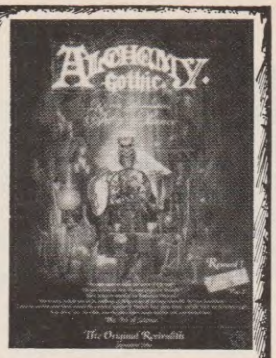

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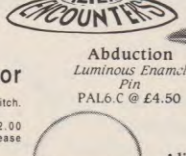
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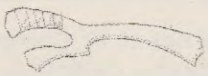

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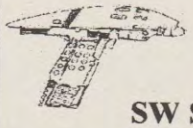

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the gaming magazine
arcane
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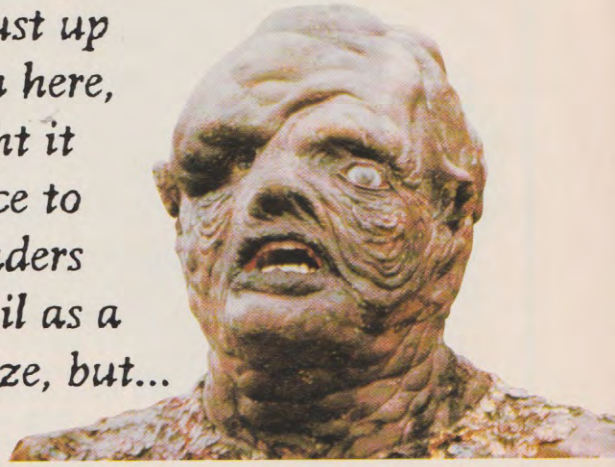
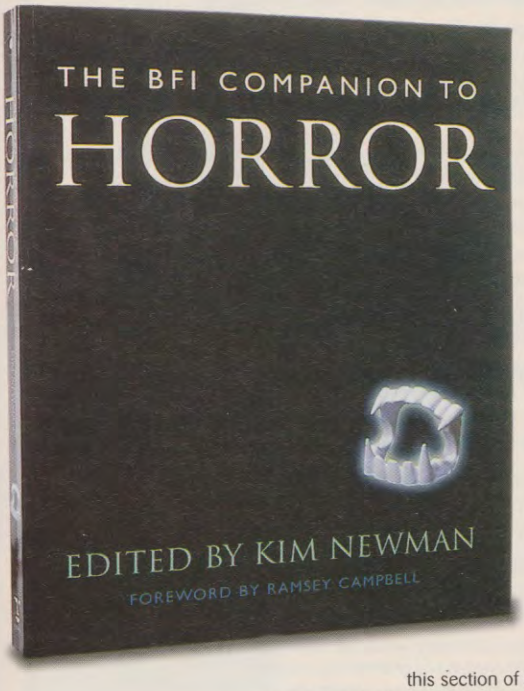
Glastonbury's just up the road from here, so we thought it would be nice to offer our readers the Holy Grail as a competition prize, but...





The BFI Companion to HORROR

edited by **Kim Newman**
with a forward by
Ramsey Campbell
Published by
Cassell
Large-format paperback
£19.99
Out now

The Great Library has, perhaps, not given this genre its due over the past year. This isn't prejudice – it's happened because nowadays most horror comes on celluloid and not in print. Next month we will address this matter by changing this section of **arcane** to include other source materials apart from fiction. We'll cover films, television, non-fiction and reference books, maps, maybe even music and photography – all sorts of refereeing aids.

Meanwhile, if you consider yourself a fan of this genre – and maybe already own a guidebook or two – this present compilation will complement your collection and suggest other works you might like to have, films you'd like to see (again?) and books you'd like to read.

The focus of this BFI publication is, unsurprisingly, film, though it pays more than lip service to the writers whose stories have been used in cinema. It is fully cross-referenced and includes entries for recurrent themes and sub-genres, as well as for 500 individuals associated with the world of horror. Strangely, though, there are no entries for particular films because the editor believes that there is enough of this sort of thing on the market already. However, where a story has been reproduced several times on film, it is treated as a sub-genre within itself and the story of the story is laid out here.

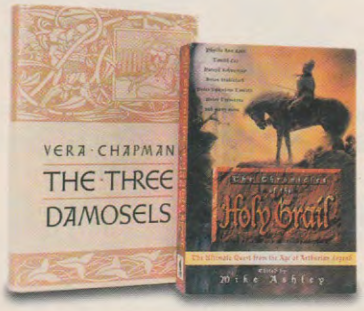
"It's what we try to get away from throughout our lives."
Boris Karloff

In the end, what gets included here is arbitrary. What Kim Newman defines as horror is what Kim Newman has come across and likes. So it is good to see that there's a heading for 'gaming' (as in roleplaying), which describes *CoC* as the "perfect game for those raised on Reagan and Thatcher" (though I'd never seen it that way before), mentions *Nightlife, V:TM* and *Kult,* and concludes that "horror roleplaying has finally come into its own twilight world" – whatever that means. This entry is basically an overview of the industry and probably won't tell you anything you don't already know, but it is reassuring to know that Newman had us in mind when compiling the book.

Nevertheless, this book won't be much use as a source of ideas, but it will point you in the right direction if you're serious enough about your campaign to be prepared to watch films and read books for your research. It also makes a nice coffee table book for any house guests who might like to nonchalantly consider such subjects as torture, serial murder and supernatural baddies. This may not be the 'ultimate' guide it claims to be, but it is certainly a worthy – though rather personalised – addition to the already enormous library of horror reference books currently available.

Jonathan Palmer
Score 7/10

The Three Damosels and The Chronicles of the Holy Grail



The Three Damosels
by **Vera Chapman**
Published by
Victor Gollancz
Hardback £16.99
Out now

The Chronicles of the Holy Grail
by **Mike Ashley**
Published by
Raven
Paperback £5.99
Out now

The Three Damosels may make die-hard traditionalists bristle. Though not at all suitable for children, this charming and romantic waltz through the Arthurian Cycle will prove somewhat whimsical and gritless for some tastes; blithely taking, as it does, a few obvious historical liberties.

It does not, though, pretend to be anything other than a heart-felt celebration of the genre, and as such might be treasured by collectors. Vera Chapman, who died last year at the age of 98, was a life-long devotee to the Arthurian legend and a founder member of the Tolkein Society.

In each of the three stories that make up this collection – *The Green Knight* (1975), *The King's Damosel* (1976) and *King Arthur's Daughter* (1976) – Chapman tries to blend established myth with fantasies of her own. Most satisfying is her re-working of *The Green Knight*, because this tale is more recognisably based in myth than fiction (though in her version, the hero is a fictitious Gawain the Younger). The other tales are altogether less convincing, but enjoyable enough, nonetheless.

The King's Damosel is about a mythologically correct character, Lynet of Lyonesse, who in this version becomes a messenger to King Arthur. *King Arthur's Daughter* – as the title suggests – is a fantasy about an imaginary heir to the throne of Britain, set soon after Arthur's death.

This collection can't really be regarded either as a definitive guide or reference, nor as a great work of fiction, though the author is obviously at home with her subject and her fast-paced stories are full of flourish. Perhaps of more and better value to referees and players involved in chivalrous pursuits – and to anyone else interested in Arthurian legend – may be *The Chronicles of the Holy Grail.*

To coin a cliché, this is very much a curate's egg. A collection of myths and stories surrounding the legend of the Grail, it both rises to spectacular heights and plumbs the depths of mediocrity. The three gems it does contain, though, are of such quality that the book as a whole can only be recommended.

The first is *The Story of Peredur* by Lady Charlotte Guest. Guest was an aristocratic intellectual who lived from 1812 to 1895. Fascinated by Arthurian legend, she translated the ancient Celtic text *The Mabinogion.* The mesmerising power of this tale caused a great amount of interest at the time. The story is an early version of the story of the Grail knight Percivale, and his vision of the Procession of the Grail. This version's power lies partly in its archaic language, which gives it the charm and depth

> **"Our bards will scour the whole of Glaston for it. But it will not be found."**
>
> **From *Maidens of the Grael* by Peter Timlett**

to transport you to an alien age, partly in the quality of its writing, and partly in the colourful excess of the action. Eerie and bizarre, I can only urge you to read it – there could be no better training in chivalry.

The two other stories of note were also written a long time ago. The short but haunting *The Legend of Sir Dinar,* written by Arthur Quiller-Couch in 1895, lingers long in the mind, as does the classic Breton legend *Peronnik the Fool* by George More (1852-1933).

None of the modern writers can match the tone or feel of these older tales but, all experts to varying degrees, together they give much flesh and historical detail to the Arthurian world. There is also an excellent introduction from editor Mike Ashley, which tries to put the legend of the grail into its historical context; and also a bibliography which could be extremely useful for those conscientious people prepared to do further research.

Gideon Kibblewhite

The Three Damosels 6/10

The Chronicles of the Holy Grail 7/10

Win the Holy Grail!

Well, no – you'll have to find that yourselves, but, in another collaboration with Victor Gollancz and Raven Books, we can offer you the chance to win copies of both the Arthurian books reviewed here. And the question you have to answer, more or less, is: What is the Grail? Answers to: "I'm glad you asked me that..." **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW.

1. Gollancz, Raven (Brân, in Welsh) and Future folk may not join the Quest.
2. Multiple entries will be restored to the Lady of the Lake.
3. The editor is a hermit monk, to whom we turn for wisdom, and competition judging.
4. Only the first ten will ride to Glaston.

Paint Your Dragon

Like Pratchett, like Rankin, and to a certain extent like Adams, Tom Holt is one of these prolific English authors who thinks he's funny. And, like Pratchett, like Rankin, and to a certain extent like Adams, he's damn right. Holt's comic style is less about a play on words, for his prose is extremely basic, but about ridiculously funny situations, seamlessly blending the usual with the completely unusual in a blasé manner.

> **"He was determined to spend as little time as possible in this poxy runabout Lada of a body."**

His latest – which has the dragon from the 'Saint George and...' combo turn up on a Boeing at Heathrow in human guise, before 'abducting' the reptilian half of a new Saint George and the Dragon sculpture to be erected in the centre of Birmingham – is nothing new in terms of style. The jokes, however, are extremely fresh, because the comic element rests in the hilarious situations and the adopted manners of the characters,

by **Tom Holt**
Published by
Orbit
Hardback £15.99
Out now
Not for sale in USA

rather than trying to slot old gags into a new plot. Of course, if you're reading Tom Holt at all, you are probably not reading it in an attempt to uncover the plot intricacies and character interaction. Oh no, you're reading it to forget about your troubles and have a bloody good laugh. And, true to form, Holt does not disappoint with *Paint Your Dragon.* It really is quite superb.

Paul Pettengale Score 8/10

The X-Files: Dead to the World and The Haunting

These two books are collections of stories from the frighteningly successful Topps Comics line of licensed *X-Files* comics. The smaller *Dead to the World* contains three – *Dead to the World, Big Foot, Warm Heart* and *Scape Goats. The Haunting* is a larger affair, featuring *Hallow Eve, One Player Only, Falling, Home of the Brave* and *The Silent Blade.*

Of the eight stories, six were written by Stefan Petrucha, with John Rozum penning the other two. Although the idea of a 'standard' *X-File* may sound like a contradiction in terms, that's what all these are – the kind of one-off episodes that don't relate to the main plots of the show. They even follow the same format as the show.

by **various writers and artists**
Published by
Titan Books
Small-format graphic novels:
Dead to the World £6.99,
The Haunting £9.99
Both out now

First there's a brief introduction which sets the scene and introduces the mystery. This is followed by the arrival of our heroes, during which Mulder explains his theory to Scully, who is predictably sceptical and pragmatic. Next there's the investigation itself, and finally there's the 'twist' at the end.

Similarly, the artwork is probably best described as adequate, rather than stunning. 'Reality' based concepts such as *The X-Files* are always hard to do in a graphic novel format, because the artists can't really use many of the traditional comic tricks. The thing has to look 'realistic', so stylised, over-exaggerated art is out. Still, the art certainly does the job, and with only one or two exceptions, it's easy to follow what's going on from panel to panel.

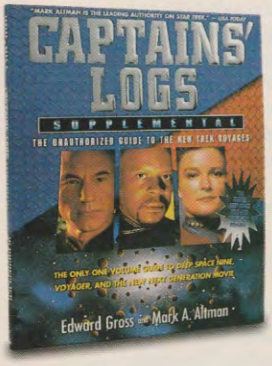
"And, to the contrary, there is every indication that Capek is what he appears to be – a homicidal psychotic."

From *One Player Only* in *The Haunting*

The problem with licenses such as *The X-Files*, where the show itself is still running, is that spin-offs like these comics are very limited in their scope. They have to stick to the accepted continuity of the show, and so can't introduce anything really new or important (and thus interesting). Given these restraints, then, both of these collections would make a fun read for any *X-Files* fan. In fact, most of the stories would translate quite well into actual episodes – if the regular *X-Files* writers ever run out of ideas, they could do worse than take a look at these books, and you couldn't really ask for more than that.

Andy Butcher ***Dead to the World* 7/10, *The Haunting* 8/10**

Captains' Logs Supplemental



by **Edward Gross** *and* **Mark A Altman**

Published by
Little, Brown

Large-format paperback
£12.99
Out now

Roll up, roll up, for the fat Ferengi's latest deal. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. With this book you can discover the dream that is *DS9* and *Voyager* – you can find out who thinks up the plots, who creates the make-up, and who did what to whom in *Star Trek: First Contact*. All this and more for just 13 bars of Her Majesty's gold-pressed latinum!

Okay, so the chances are you're not going to run into a fat Ferengi in your local bookstore, but the sales pitch is going to be the same. And as with all the best pitches it's all completely true, although not necessarily all the truth…

Captains' Logs Supplemental is the latest update of Gross and Altman's Log Book series. Formerly published annually by Boxtree, the Log Books were unofficial behind-the-scenes guides to *DS9* and *Voyager*. Each one featured interviews with the cast and crew, as well as episode guides for that year and write-ups of Boxtree's *DS9* novels. They were also dire – poorly edited, poorly printed and deeply unsatisfying.

"I think people are excited about the show because we are."

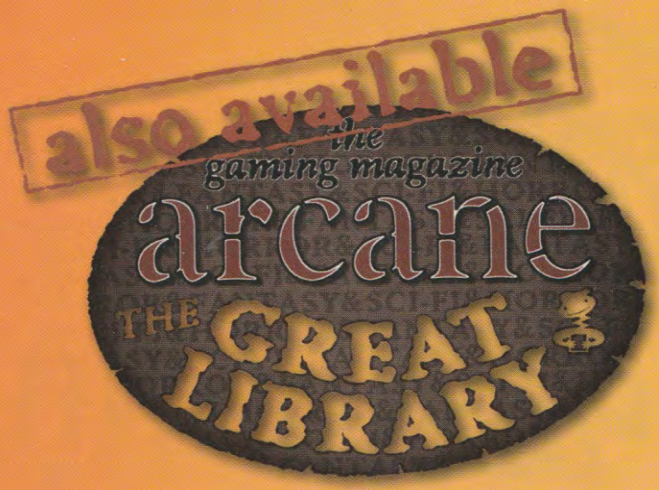
Kate Mulgrew

But you'll be glad to hear all that has changed now. *Captains' Logs Supplemental* has undergone a major refit, and the new publisher should definitely be congratulated on the upgrade. Unlike Boxtree's series, the new book includes material from every season, and what's more there's also a much-welcomed index, something which was infuriatingly absent in previous editions.

Of course, if you've got any of the authors' other guides then you'll have read significant chunks of this book before, but newcomers will find plenty to chew on. In fact, the only thing that really lets this guide down is the pictures. Forget impressively lacquered, high-quality prints, here it's all diddy black-and-white snaps printed on bog-standard paper. And what snaps! Magazine and book covers, grainy PR shots and some polaroids which have been taken on the run.

Still, providing you're not too picky about your piccies, this is certainly an interesting peek at the history of the two shows. It's not as glossy as the official *Making of Deep Space Nine*, but with that now sadly out of print, this could well be the best deal you'll get from a fat Ferengi this year.

Karen Levell Score 7/10



More on *DS9*

The Making of Deep Space Nine

A gorgeous if slightly "kissy-kissy" account of *DS9's* creation.
Published by Simon & Schuster
Out of print, but check out specialist second-hand book stores.

The New Trek Guide

A decent book, but it only covers the first two seasons of *DS9*.
Published by Virgin Books Paperback £5.99 Out now

New from TSR

Murder in Halruaa

A *Forgotten Realms* fantasy mystery by Richard Meyers
Hardback £10.99 Out now

Advertised on the back cover of **arcane** 14, this is the third in TSR's Murder series. Gideon Kibblewhite slagged the last two off in **arcane** 9, but there's always a location worth going to or a character worth meeting.

The Doom Brigade

A *Dragonlance* novel by Margaret Weis and Don Perrin
Hardback £13.99 Out now

The authors of *The Knights of the Black Earth* (**arcane** 11) cross over from Victor Gollancz to collaborate on a fantasy treasure hunt in Krynn.

Also out in paperback

To Sleep with Evil by Andria Cardarelle *(Ravenloft)*
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Stormlight by Ed Greenwood *(Forgotten Realms)*
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The Dragons by Douglas Niles *(Dragonlance)*
The Dawning of a New Age by Jean Rabe *(Dragonlance 5th Age)*

arcane scribblings

Lots of letters, and lots of replies. What else would you expect in the letters pages then, eh?

Dear arcane,

I think the squabbling in **arcane** has finally subsided and the opposing sides have managed to come to the (inevitable) conclusion that a group's choice of playing style, whether it be the 'loads of background and character notes' persuasion or any other, is down to nothing more than personal taste. Unfortunately I think we're now getting into the argument about the respective merits of live-action roleplaying verses tabletop games. This will go on for a few issues with numerous letters defending each side and denouncing the other as 'not roleplaying.' It would be really nice if everyone could avoid clogging up the letters pages with these useless arguments and just accept that this too is a matter of personal choice.

Paul Watson, Nottingham

Agreed, though a little constructive argument does help to spice up the letters pages. Still, let's have no more letters saying that roleplaying (in any form) isn't roleplaying, eh?

Dear arcane,

Just wanted to drop you a line to say thank you for an interesting, funny and extremely entertaining roleplaying magazine. So, "thank you!"

However, I have just a couple of questions I would like to ask you. 1) Are **arcane**'s competitions open to people who live in countries other than the UK? 2) If not, why not?

That's it for now – have a happy Christmas all of you!

Someone in Sweden

Er, thanks. Christmas will, of course, have come and gone by the time this issue hits the streets, but still, thanks again for the well wishes. Regarding your questions: **arcane***'s competitions are open to any reader, no matter where they happen to live on the globe, unless otherwise stated in the rules of the competition. We also accept entries via e-mail for all of our compos. Send your e-mails to:* arcane@futurenet.co.uk *However, if you e-mail us an entry, you are not entitled to send us an entry via traditional post as well – it's a strict rule of one entry per person, no matter how you send it. And yes, we do screen them all for multiple entries.*

Dear arcane,

Peter Jones was quite right in **arcane** 14 when he stated that there were some tables missing from the new version of *Traveller*. I have discovered the missing tables, and a mass of other errata on the Imperium Games Web site. Find it at: http://www.imperium.com/

While I am not surprised that the new edition of *Traveller* contains errata, the importance of the missing information is critical and is something that is impossible to cover using house rules. To make matters worse, the errata sheet was not included in the rules booklet, nor was any mention made of its existence. I found it quite by accident, and I am lucky because I have access to the Internet.

All this suggests to me that Imperium rushed the new edition of *Traveller* into production. Let's hope that any forthcoming sourcebooks are not subject to the same kind of bad reviewing prior to publication.

Simon Perry, Wolverhampton

It's not uncommon for a rulebook to go to press with some errors, though yes, it is unfortunate that there was no errata sheet supplied with the game in this instance. Take note Imperium!

Dear arcane,

The results of your 'top 50 games of all time' readers' poll were quite astounding! Never once in my wildest imaginings had I thought that *Call of Cthulhu* would come out top – it just so happened that we were playing it the very same day we bought that particular issue of your magazine (**arcane** 14).

Damien McKeating, Newcastle

Didn't surprise us in the least.

Dear arcane,

Just a short letter to comment on your poll for the best 50 games ever…

There was no real surprise with the top three, which I've played at some time over my many years of roleplaying. The biggest shock, however, was to see *RuneQuest* claim the number five spot. Even though I'm a self-confessed *RuneQuest* nut, I was still overjoyed at how popular the game remains. But, I ask you, how many people still actually play it? It does beg the question: where would *RuneQuest* be now if it had received the same level of support as *Call of Cthulhu* and *AD&D*? It has been sad to see the game slip from the shelves of the various roleplaying shops, and to see its supplements being sold off at half-price to get rid of them.

It was also noticeable that most of the best games were over a decade old. This either means that the more recent games are simply not good enough, that roleplayers are set in their ways, or that we play the new games, but our nostalgia for the 'good-old games' has shone through. What do you think?

Steve Bartle, Newark

RuneQuest is a game of which I've got fond memories also, though I haven't played it regularly for four years now. But hopefully interest in the Gloranthan setting will be fuelled next year, when Chaosium releases a brand new game which uses Glorantha as a campaign background.

As far as all the best games being released ten years or more ago, well, I think that there have been equally good games released recently (Don't Look Back, *for instance, or* Deadlands, Feng Shui *or many others), but these don't hold the same nostalgic value as many of the old 'classics'. I don't think that these latter games are any worse than the old, it's just that they haven't been played as much.*

Dear arcane,

I liked the top 50 RPGs feature – it reminded me about some of the games I've played over the years and how good they were *(Paranoia)* or weren't *(Rolemaster). Over the Edge* is one of the best RPGs around and also one of the most underplayed – the fact that it made an appearance and its (low) position were no surprise. My regular group probably wouldn't like it because guns are illegal on Al Amarja. Don't understand the high placing/editorial raving about *Judge Dredd*, though. GW published some very good scenarios for it and the rules were good, but as an RPG it failed because the judges are all the same! It was impossible to play a three-dimensional character unless you were a psi-judge. I also don't know why the Editor felt the impulse to write, "What's it called?" above every entry in the top 50 either.

As for the rest of the mag, **arcane** is definitely getting better! 'Die Hard with a D20' was excellent, and it was good to see *Aria* get a good pasting. I was away travelling for six months and the improvements between issue two and

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked '***arcane** *scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, *30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. The slightly more technically advanced among you can send us a fax on (01225) 732252, while all you fully-fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:* arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our Web site at:* http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html. *We look forward to hearing from you.*

We all smell bad

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

I am writing with a very important question: why do most roleplayers and collectable card game players have such bad body odour problems? I have noticed that by the end of the day, most conventions have an unmistakable odour which can taint the venue for months. Even sports halls smell worse after our fellow gamers have sat down and given it their all in the latest tournament.

Why is this? I am a clean kind of guy, and hate the fact that people move away from our gaming area of the pub simply because most of the other people there smell. We all know that our hobby is frowned upon by the rest of society, so why make it worse for ourselves by forgetting to wash? (I assume most of you do forget – or do you hum for a reason?) No wonder so few women get involved in roleplaying. So, come on lads, make an effort and use some deodorant – it won't let you down.

Mark Ogilvie, TSR Customer Support, Cambridge

What? Someone at TSR having a go at our readers? We won't allow that! Come down to Bath you fiend, and we'll lock you in a room with half-a-dozen of our dirty T-shirts. That'll sort you out.

issue eight were immense. The covers of the first two or three issues were a mess. However, the articles now have more substance and the design has become much less intrusive.

Richard Green, e-mail

Thanks for your comments about the recent issue. To pick you up on one point with which I disagree: judges in the Judge Dredd *roleplaying game aren't all faceless characters – think of the judges in the comic strip. It wasn't just the psi-judges that had some character, plenty of the ordinary street judges did too. There's no reason why this shouldn't be any different in the game. So give it a go.*

Dear arcane,

I've noticed a strange and disturbing trend in the games market recently, which was highlighted by the reviews section in issue 14. Nine of the games reviewed have a colon in the title (eg. *Requiem: Grim Harvest* and *Aria: Roleplaying* to name two). Although I'm a great fan of the White Wolf range of products (the pioneers of colon titles), I can't help but feel that we should remember our humble beginnings and return to games with the word 'and' in the title (such as *Tunnels and Trolls* and, of course, *Dungeons and Dragons).*

David Abrey, e-mail

Colons, eh, who needs 'em? Next: ordinary people in roleplaying games (yet again)...

Dear arcane,

Congratulations on your new look. The magazine looks 'serious' now – at times, particularly with the early issues, it tended to look a little lightweight. Of course the smaller/tighter text also allows you room to try to 'protect' Andrew before the critics get to savage him. He seemed to be particularly misunderstood in his 'Ordinary bloke – The RPG' article a couple of issues ago. I read this as a continuation, or restating, of a view he has expressed before that roleplaying is marginalized as part of 'genre' fiction (mainly SF/Fantasy/Horror) and should branch out into 'mainstream' fiction to gain more respect and/or new players. Films such as *Wall Street, Disclosure* or *Broadcast News,* for instance, are about ordinary people, yet are less likely to be turned into roleplaying games than, say, *Batman* (which also starred Michael Keaton), *Jurassic Park* (also written by Michael Crichton), or any other SF/Fantasy film. (I admit it, I can't remember who wrote or starred in *Broadcast News* for another comparison!)

The most popular programmes, week in, week out, on British TV are the soaps – *Coronation Street, EastEnders, Brookside* etc. These are about 'ordinary people', yet plenty of viewers find them compelling enough to sit down three or four times a week to watch them – I bet Stuart Moses wishes he had that much commitment from his players!

Tim Ellis, e-mail

Many of us wish we had that kind of a commitment, and even more of us wish we could make it. But really, that should close the debate over whether ordinary people make good roleplaying characters or not. Okay?

Dear arcane,

I thought I'd write in about tie-in games, such as the forthcoming *Babylon 5* roleplaying game. What do you guys think about them?

Personally, I reckon they are good and bad – good in that they may draw fans of the licensed title into roleplaying, when otherwise they may have been uninterested, and bad in that it may end up like the computer games industry (in which I work) with hot licenses used to sell bad games. Still, it would be nice to see a smurfs roleplaying game.

'Al', e-mail

It's difficult to lump all tie-in games together, because some really work well, and others are blatant attempts to cash in on the success of any given movie, book or TV series. I think, in the case of the Babylon 5 *game, we're going to have to reserve our judgement – we've not seen the game yet, after all. However, there are a number of excellent tie-in games, foremost among them being the* Star Wars RPG, *which is quite superb.*

Dear arcane,

Just thought to inform you that in your otherwise catchy 2053-TNK-e: Deep Space Probe encounter (issue 14), there was one slight error.

As a Finn I was proud to see a member of our small northern nation represented in the encounter, especially as the character was not a stereotypical Finn – someone who's sulking and silent, and who drinks a bottle of liquor for breakfast along with a tin of sardines.

But, Heikki happens to be a man's name, whereas this character in your encounter was a woman. The name you were probably after is Heli, a fairly common woman's first name in Finland.

Sippo Mentumen, Turku, Finland

Thanks for putting us in the picture Sippo. Jon insists that he knows several Finns called Heikki who are women, but then he knows some very odd people indeed.

Dear arcane,

I have very much enjoyed recent copies of **arcane** and thought I would congratulate you on your recent innovation, that of adding 'Ed's comments' to articles.

This is particularly useful in the case of Andrew Rilstone's column, because it is obviously essential to distinguish rampant heresy from accepted dogma. For instance, I hate to think of the chaos and misery that would have ensued throughout the known world if unwise gamers had taken Andrew's suggestion of roleplaying without a system seriously – fortunately the Ed was at hand with his 'don't try this at home kids' disclaimer.

Louise Holden, Horley

We put the Ed's comments into the columns rather tentatively, and have had a mixed response. Overall it was felt that these were negative additions (especially on the `uk.games.roleplaying` *newsgroup on the Internet – your comments were noted Phil), and so in this issue we've withdrawn them, giving the authors extra space to write more. Let us know what you think about this decision.*

arcane shorts

Here are some small, but perfectly formed snippets from the rest of the month's mailbag.

Acting in roleplaying, free-form verses dice-based, live-action verses tabletop – all this stuff, just play it your own way, it's the right way, but not the only way. Play and enjoy, that's all that matters.

Stephen Baskerville

That's cleared that up, then.

Weresheep exist. I know. I have seen then.

Nick Wilshin

Yeah, and I've seen the gardens of Babylon in Fulham.

As for Andy Tucker's comment in **arcane** 5 about you guys not making it past issue 8 – well I don't think you'll make it past issue 1,000.

Paul Harter

Hmm, I'll be 82 years of age and, to be honest, I don't think I'll last that long.

Could you find the space in your magazine to tell your readers that RPI is currently looking for budding game designers. We would like to hear from anyone who enjoys playing roleplaying games so they can be considered for playtesting for our future products. Anyone interested should write to: RPI, 57 Teesdale Road, Slough, SL2 1UA.

Steve Saunders, RPI

Yes, we can.

I'm after a game which is light-hearted and fun. It has to be roleplaying. Any ideas?

Mike Hutchinson

Well, you could try Paranoia *by West End Games – that just about has to take the biscuit as a game which is distinctly fun, although equally silly.*

More play-by-mail coverage please! PBM is a very enjoyable form of our hobby, and cheap for that matter.

Stephen Davies

Look out for a special play-by-mail feature which is currently scheduled to appear in issue 17 – it'll be a cracker.

free reader ads

This month, seeing as how you are becoming increasingly vociferous, we have published your notices over three pages. More power to the readers...

games for sale

● *Star Wars* RPG for sale. Many supplements, 1st and 2nd edition. *Rolemaster* 1st edition books. All in VGC. Pat Eadie 01705 501200

● A bargain! *TWG:2,000 2nd ed* plus 11 supplements – £28. 60 A4 sheets of GW floorplans, 48 in shop condition – £10. Plus more. For list, phone Dave on 01279 462040

A bargain indeed. But not 'Bargain of the Month', which this month comes all the way from America.

● *AD&D* rules cyclopedia plus 11 supplements, various titles – £50. Contact Taff on 01293 412234, weekends only

● *AD&D, Spelljammer, Immortals, Hollow World, Mystara.* Send SSAE for lists to DM Whitfield, 13 Winchester Road, Portsmouth, Hants PO2 7PS

● Amiga games for sale. All originals. Write to Stuart Hardy, 33 Fir Tree Drive, Wales, Sheffield S31 8LZ

Stuart also offers hints and tips on all your favourite Amiga games, which he obviously knows inside out. There are a few people like that round here.

● CD32 with 13 games – £100. Various Amiga games – £2-£10 each. Call Lee on 0113 271 3532 after 5pm

● Collector's clear-out. Various items for sale. Send SAE to M Mason, 16 Colley Hill, Bradwell, Milton Keynes MK13 9DA

● *Judge Dredd, TMNTOS, Marvel Superheroes, Traveller.* Some *AD&D* stuff. *WH40K* figures. Phone Ryan on 01799 501026

● RPGs, board games, rules, figures, CCGs, magazines. SAE to Chas, 50 Washbrook Rd, Rushden NN10 9UX

● Original *AD&D Fiend Folio*, VGC – £40. *Deities & Demons* – £30. *DM's Guide* – £30. Robert 01202 877645

● *Rolemaster, D&D, RuneQuest* modules and rulebooks for sale at low prices. Over 100 items on offer! Jeremy Ries 01223 328745

● RPGs (inc supps) – *Torg, Space Master, Golden Heroes, Pendragon, DMG 2nd.* Board games – *Dragonlance, Blood Royale, Kings 'n' Things.* Ian 01384 78952

● Various Games Workshop games and add-ons. Call after 6pm and ask for Matt. Nottingham area please. 0115 978 3168

● Want a completely free RPG? Download *Space Renegade* from `http://www.fitz.cam.ac.uk/~rgh22`

● 20 great roleplaying games for Atari ST computer. Boxed originals. £50 the lot. Contact Steve on 0191 477 0912

cards for sale

● Full *ME:TW* limited set including one Ring and Frodo – £260. Mint. Ring Colin on 0181 851 1856

● *Arcadia* cards for sale or trade. Contact John, 1 Birkland Avenue, Mapperley, Nottingham NG3 5LA. 0115 967 4688, after 6pm

● Autographed *Legend of the Five Rings* cards for sale. Contact Bob Hobbs, Box 4545, Middletown, Rhode Island, USA 02842

● For the cards you want at the cheapest prices send list to SA Lake, 74 Newbridge Hill, Bath BA1 3QA

● **Bargain of the Month**
Grab bag. 1,000+ *Magic* cards including 20 rares and 200 uncommons. Only US$100 or half order US$65. Write to Robert Martin, 333 N Kaspar Avenue #A-1, Arlington Heights, IL 60005 USA. Telephone 001 847 253 9912

● *Magic* sets – *Unlimited, Dark, Antiquities.* Partial sets – *Legends, Arabian Nights,* plus many more. Call Mike on 01304 372209

● *Mythos* (limited edition). One starter pack and two boosters. Call Andrew on 0171 813 9072 or e-mail `gothtech@ dircon.co.uk`

● *V:TES, Ancient Hearts, Dark Sovereigns, Jyhad, Sabbat* CCG trades. Morien 01452 533629

● *X-Files, Star Wars* CCGs. Cards for sale or swap for OOP *Magic:TG.* Phone John 01295 267262

● 400+ *V:TES* cards for sale/trade for RPG stuff. *AD&D, WW, Cthulhu, Cyberpunk.* Barry 01295 712159

● *Rage: Legacy of the Tribes* – I have Jorge Bolivar and I want to swap him for Modi Votishal. Contact James 01705 378442

Not sure we like the sound of that. We trust these pages are not being used by any unscrupulous kidnappers, terrorists and ransomers.

● *ST:TNG, Jyhad, V:TES* and *Rage.* Darryl 0131 553 1139

wanted

● Any RPGs for PC – especially *AD&D.* Best prices paid. Contact Chris Giles, pretty please. University of Wales, Lampeter, PO Box 23, Ceredigion SA48 7YG – e-mail `NP345@Lamp.ac.uk`

● *Star Trek* Q Continuum, Manheim's Dimensional Door – will swap for Taris Romulan Officer. Ultimate combat rares – will swap with other rares of different CCGs or Ultimate Combat rares. Future Enterprise – will swap for 13 rare Alternate Universe cards worth over £100. Pat Eadie 01705 501200

● *Dragonlance* modules and accessories. Phone after 6pm. Jeremy 01386 422247

● *Dragonlance* modules from the *DL* series (especially *DL15).* Will pay any reasonable asking price. Also material from *Marvel Superheroes* game (particularly *Ultimate Powers* handbook). Can anyone help? Alan 0191 388 7122 after 4pm

● Designers/writers/artists to contribute to sci-fi RPG. Phone Daniel 01244 371339 – office hours please

● Does anyone out there have *Star Frontiers Alpha Dawn* RPG for sale? Please get in touch with James Clark on 0181 715 6589

● *Golden Heroes, Super World, Super Hero 2044* and any super scenarios. Details to Steve, who is on 01463 831396

● *Ivid the Undying* printout, *Vecna Lives* and *Greyhawk* adventures. Contact Robert Langford, St David's College, PO Box 23, Lampeter SA48 7YG – e-mail: `NP134@lamp.ac.uk`

● *Jorune 1st ed,* supplements for 1st and 2nd eds, old *Tékumel* stuff. Other obscure OOP items probably of interest. `matthijs@idgonline.no` Matthijs Holter, Smalgangen 16, N-0188 Oslo, Norway

● *M:TG 'Gauntlet of Might'* – artefact from unlimited edition in mint or near-mint condition. Ole 01865 326100

● *Magic* OOPs and black bordered. Will buy/trade or bit of both. Contact Chad on 0115 913 0603

● Mattel Electronics *Dungeons & Dragons* circa 1980. Must be complete. Up to £50. Call Mark on 0114 231 3025

● Single *Magic* cards, current rares or any older cards. Steve 01621 784515 (reasonable prices paid)

● *Soldiers of the Queen* wargames rules for *Space 1889* by GDW wanted. Contact Anthony Morton 01483 767394

● *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Other Strangeness.* Will pay £8. Write to J Daniels, Orchard Cottage, Godolphin Cross, Helston, Cornwall TR13 9QY

● *Victorian Adventures* by RAFM for *Space 1889* or other suitable figures. Contact Simon 01276 855721

contacts

● *Illuminati* player, London, seeks others to form a league. Contact Simon 0181 986 0456

Speak to the Guild, Simon. They have plenty of players in your area. See the clubs section on the right for details.

● Help! Wanted any *World of Darkness* roleplayers in the County Durham area. Sabbat and Malkavians welcome. Paul 01325 313342

● *AD&D* players in Northampton/Rugby area wanted. Beginners and both sexes welcome. Contact Mike 01788 823291

● Are there any *M:TG* clubs in Stockport, Ashton or Manchester? Phone Matt 01457 852701 or Gareth 01457 853821

● Bored roleplayer, 24, seeks group, 20+, in Guildford area. Can GM. Call John after 6pm, 01483 455346

● Computer adventurer offers help on many games. Write to Paul Hardy, 33 Firtree Drive, Wales, Sheffield S31 8LZ for details

● Coventry area. Used to be experienced but hasn't played for a few years. Looking for club to join. Steve McVeigh 01203 678100

● Player needed for club in Epsom/Worcester Park area. Variety of games played. Contact Simon on 01372 811205

● Experienced DM seeks roleplay group for *RuneQuest/Stormbringer-*

style game. Contact Paul, Neston 0151 336 5114

● Experienced roleplayer (17) seeks gamers in Anglesey. *AD&D, Star Wars, Shadowrun,* etc. Contact Hywel on 01407 740809

● Small group of gamers desperately seeking more players and GMs of any RPG in the Isle of Man. Juan Moore 01624 825788 after 6pm
These people really are desperate. The nearest gamers we know of are in Anglesey, but that's quite a coracle ride, especially at this time of year. So please help them out if you're from the Isle of Man.

● Roleplayer seeks RPG/LRPG groups in the Bristol/Bath/South Gloucestershire area. Dice roll withdrawal syndrome imminent. Please help. Graham 0117 965 6061 ext 4486 (evenings) or e-mail 100602.2714@ compuserve.com

● New to the area. Are there any roleplayers about? Contact Bruce, 1st floor, 18 Albert Street, Newton Stewart DG8 6EJ

● Norwich RPG/boardgame group seeks new players. Experience unimportant. Friday evenings. Interested? Kenton 01603 502056

● South African ex-pat roleplayer seeks group in London. Any system. Call Andy 0181 534 2887

● Novice *M:TG* player wants players or club for regular duels. Sheffield area. Contact Daniel 0114 266 7670

● Novice gamer (14) seeks *AD&D/Cthulhu* players in the Bridgwater area. Please help. Stuart 01278 426735

● Players and GMs needed for group. Stephen Ennis, 2c West End Villas, Coundon, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham DL14 8PJ

● Players needed (m/f) to join exotic FRPG (rules light) – heavy on atmosphere. Contact Paul on 0115 985 6764

● Wanted – roleplayers (m/f) for existing mixed group. *AD&D* and others, 20+ preferred. Darlington area. Mark 01325 469255

● Players wanted for *GURPS, Star Trek* and others in the Crawley area. Please write to Alec Holland, 29 Banks Road, Pound Hill, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 7BT

● Players/GMs (18+) for *Vampire, Cthulhu, Shadowrun, Fading Suns, Star Wars* around Saffron Walden. Phone Ryan 01799 501026

● Reliable New Forest roleplayer/referee seeks group/other players for regular games and laughs. Hythe. John 01703 841477

● *Shadowrun* players wanted for the Harlow area. 18+ preferred. Male or female. Call Jason 01279 427099

● Willing 'victims' required for *Planescape.* Mixed gender group, sense of humour is essential! March area, Friday evenings. Call Chris on 01354 657713

● York GM forming new group seeks gamers. Experience unnecessary. 20+. Contact Jonathan on 01904 639722

● 19 year-old seeks gamers in local area. Willing to play pretty much anything. Contact Simon Bradley on 01773 822134

live action

● *Alternate Realities.* Edinburgh-based LARP group. Interested? Contact Andrew on 0131 440 1873 or e-mail ahar@srv1.med.ed.ac.uk

● Attention *Gathering* fans! The Legion is recruiting. New members welcome. Interested? Lord Ordos (Pete) 0181 428 8820 or 838 1163

● Bradford's infamous Vampire Society seeks new blood – e-mail splegg@comp.brad.ac.uk for details of our roleplaying system

● *Elemental Lords* fantasy LRP. Magic, monsters and mayhem. Newcomers welcome. Worcestershire based. Contact Paul on 01905 428386

● Crown of Thorns LRP club offers Tolkein-style adventures in the Sussex area. Contact Simon 01444 811367

● LRP investigators/monsters (any age) for a *CoC* LRP event in the South. For more details call Matt 01705 696477, or write to Matt Scott, 180 Stubbington Avenue, Portsmouth, Hants PO2 0JL

● Experienced live roleplayer wants to get in contact with LARP groups around the London area. Call Gary on 0181 7492688

● For sale. LARP crossbow – £12. John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5 0SL
This was our third contender for 'Bargain of the Month' but we don't know exactly how a latex crossbow would work.

● Midgard LRP game every Sunday in the Bishops Stortford area. Contact Jason 01279 659127 for details

Play-By-Mail

● *Anarchy* Fanzine/PBM. Playtesters needed for free first go PBMs. It's

roleplaying clubs and societies

If you want your gang included in this section, tell us the name of your club, the days and times you meet, what and where you play, and a contact name and telephone number. We'll print it in next month's clubs listing. For nothing.

● **Bath Roleplaying Club**, Sundays, 11.30-5pm. No fees. Needs new players (18+).
Neal 01225 463631

● **Black Country Roleplaying Society**, Thursdays, 7.30pm. Blackheath Coronation Social Club, Park Street, Rowley Regis, West Midlands. All ages and games – 70p a night.
Steve Turner 01384 235244

● **Bradford Games Club**, Sundays, 11am-6.30pm Gingerbread Centre, Darley Street, Bradford Centre. "We play anything."

● **East Midlands RPGA/Harlequins Games Club**, Sundays, 1.45-6pm. 2nd Arnold (St Marys) Scout HQ, Atherley House, Calverton Road, Arnold, Nottingham.
Simon Stoppard 0115 921 5533
John Harris 0115 939 4185
sara@theleys.demon.co.uk

● **East Kilbride Games Club,** "Speak fish man!"
John 01355 260601

● **Finchley Games Club**, Thursdays, 6.30-10.30pm. Old Finchleians Sports Club, Woodside Park. Now in its tenth year.
Seren 0181 202 3856

● **Glasgow University Gaming Society**, Thursdays (term time only), 5pm. Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens. Non-students welcome.

● **Guild of Melée and Magic,** Various days, Various venues. First visit free if you take along a copy of **arcane**, annual membership £5.
Central (Mondays RPGs, Tuesdays CCGs)
– Jason 0181 715 8675, The George, 213 Strand WC2
West (Saturdays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Gerald 0181 991 1297*
East (Thursdays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Mel 0181 595 3467*
South (Sundays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Jon 0181 699 9654*

● **Manticore Games Club**, Thursday, 7.30pm. Old Bell, Hemel Hempstead. Cards, boardgames, RPGs.
Steve 0181 903 5446

● **Minotaur's Head Roleplay Society,** North London. RPGs, CCGs, wargames, freeform.
Steve 0181 482 5568

● **Pembrokeshire Games Club**, Wednesday, 6-9pm. Community Education Centre, Haverfordwest. *Magic, AD&D, Vampire, Necromunda.*
Adam 01437 762633

● **Redcar Adventurers Roleplaying Games Club**, Friday, 6-9pm. Redcar Library.
John 01287 642523

● **Ring of Mages,** *M:TG* club.
Jamie 01888 544880

● **Roleplayers of Chester**, Wednesdays, 7.30pm-late. Chester Rail Club, Hoole
Greg 01606 883698 or *Allison 0151 200 6945*

● **Rugby Players' Guild**, Monday, 7.30-11.00pm. Players and GMs (18+) welcome
Bill 01788 334165
Keary 01788 334941

● **Spartan Circle Club**, Sunday, 6.30-10.30pm. St Laurence's Centre, Northfield, Birmingham
Paul Rickards 0121 415 4722

● **Stockport Goblin Horde RP Club,** Wednesdays, 7.00pm. *AD&D, WFRP, Shadowrun* etc.
Rachel 0161 456 1444

● **The Albion Guard Games Club**, Mondays and Tuesdays. The Plough, Dog's Head Street, Ipswich.
Keith 01473 289560

● **The Orc's Armpit**, Second Wednesday every month. Hobson's Choice, Banbury. *Magic, Trek* CCGs. *Earthdawn, Warhammer* RPGs.

● **Wandsworth RPG**, Mondays, 7.30pm. 57a Heathfield Road, Wandsworth
Dave 0171 738 1807

● **West London Card Games**, Tuesdays. The Castle, Acton. *Magic, Star Wars,* etc.
John 0171 772 1957 (days)
0181 993 4439 (evenings)

A young reader writes, "Oi! All you clubs out there! Stop age discrimination. It doesn't make you hard." Harty (aged 12).

free, what's to lose? Craig Boyes, 6 Hill Top Way, Braithwaite, Keighley, W Yorks BD22 6HP

● Free! Playtesters wanted for single character FPBM which is set in the ancient city of Morchael. Send a SSAE to Daniel Wright, 40a Wood Road, Trefforest, Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan CF37 1RQ

● *Global Aerial Dominion* (New PBM). Apocalyptic war using military aircraft! Send SSAE to: Dave, 9 King's Avenue, Marcham, Abingdon OX13 6QA

fanzines

● Article contributions wanted for new wargames/roleplaying fanzine. Any topics. Contact Joshua on 01452 740969 for details

● Artwork wanted! Amateur and professional for fantasy magazine: violence, magic, vampires, sci-fi. *Role Your Own*, 61 Lord Nelson Street, Nottingham NG2 4AJ

● *Imagonem* – Norwegian gaming fanzine. In glorious Norwegian, of course. Matthijs Holter, Smalgangen 16, N-0188 Oslo, Norway

● *Defiant* – CCG fanzine. *Magic, Star Trek, X-Files*, etc. 90p + SSAE – 65 Jelbert Way, Penzance TR18 3DP. 01736 332800

● Fantasy and Science Fiction writers/artists required for new magazine. Send SAE to 12 Shannon Court, 1 Tavistock Road, Croydon CR0 2AL for details

● Free fantasy and sci-fi magazine on-line now at `http://www.sf-fantasy.com` Includes original artwork gallery, fiction, reviews, conventions and much more. Visit us right now!

● *The Jawa Melting Pot* – a *Star Wars* RPG fanzine – needs submissions! John Greenhaigh, 1 Masefield Avenue, Radcliffe, Manchester M26 3GZ

● 'On The Grey Carpet...' Read the next 4,997 words or so only in *Espylacopa 3*. £1.50. Gorgeous. Wes White, Splott's Moor Farm, Wick, Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 8JS

● *Project X, Red Dwarf, Sea Quest, DSV*, sci-fi, fantasy magazine. It's free. What a guy! Craig John Boyes, 6 Hill Top Way, Braithwaite, Keighley, W Yorks BD22 6HP

● *Roll Your Own* issue 7 + archives. *Vampire* and *Cyberpunk*. 75p+p&p. Cheques payable to Mark Brassington, 61 Lord Nelson Street, Sneinton, Nottingham NG2 4AJ

● *Tomb 3:* the vampire quarterly. Out now – £2.50. *V:TM, V:TES, Sabbat, Kindred, The Embraced, Necrohunter* +. Morien 01452 533629

● *Warpstone* issue 3. The *WFRP* fanzine. £2.50 (£9 for 4 issues). John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5

miniatures

● Figure painting by *Golden Demon* winner. Fast, efficient service. Send SAE to Paul Naylor, 27 Diamond Street, York YO3 7LH

● *Star Wars* miniatures needed. Rebels and imperials. Good prices. Also any *Star Wars* battles supplements. Shane 01849 469522

● 15mm *Traveller* and *Laserburn* miniatures or vehicles wanted. Send price list to Danny Kilpatrick, 16 Academy Street, Armadale EH48 3JD

messages

● Istahar. I seek thee still, my love. Those who dream can see us clearly. We awake.

● Mr Read. I have the weresheep in question. Call to discuss details. A baaad moon rises. Krys Mason on 0117 935 0079

Our quest for weresheep culminated when resident artist Stephen Lillie supplied us with the relevant copy of Role Player Independent *(May 1993). Jonathan Turner's article is pure nonsense and full of cheesy puns –* **arcane** *recommends it highly. We will, however, enter into no further correspondence on the subject. So it's baa-baa weresheep. Okay?*

● Experiment gone wrong. Creatures escaped, killed the professor and all researchers. Somebody help! (static) Transmission ends

Serves 'em right. Don't you know animal experimentation is WRONG? Who needs penicillin, anyway?

● Goa – I'm going to get you! You can run but you can't hide. Cal Grayswandir

● So, Hanash, you are finally on your butt. And how does it feel? Rakfell is ours now

● Happy 18th birthday for Andy 'The Dark One' Kennedy on Friday 13th December. Congratulations from all of your elders

● Perhaps, one day, I too can seek the glory that awaits in Morchael

● Ranholm Godsluck now lies gathering dust in his grave. He was whomped. No luck this time

USS Bozeman

The captains are learning. It's kill or be killed out here. Bateson's got the message – but what about that snotling situation on his ship?

● This is Captain Bateson of the USS Bozeman. Raise shields. Lock photons on the Freeship Profit and fire

Kaboom! Captain No'Face was warned last month. Now he is known mockingly as Captain 'No Ship'! – Captain Bateson is not a man to make idle threats.

● Melnibon to CEV Hunter: Leave now or suffer the same fate as Grand Admiral Stride. Endit

● Rebel leader to USS Hero: At last I have tracked you down. Prepare to die

Mouth? Check. Trousers?

● USS Destiny to Bozeman: Envidium filament in place. Will invoke the ninth rite on your signal

● Merc. Ship Dawn Treader to USS Hero – myself and crew are willing to assist. Awaiting instructions

Waiting to be blown to smithereens, more like.

● To the leaders of the ships in the vicinity of space debris sd-79zx2. Greetings from The Brave Inquisitor and our most wise and munificent Emperor, The Most Exalted Palpatine. We come from another galaxy, and were conducting experiments on a new drive when a computer fault caused a premature ending to our tests. We mean no harm and send a message of good will to all your people. We would be very grateful if you could help us complete repairs to our ship.

Easy, mate! This is a PBM game not a forum for extravagantly wordy Declarations of Peace. While **arcane** *always appreciates messages of good will from distant galaxies, space is at a premium – especially in Sector 999.*

● Take a break from the battle – visit Quigly's snackbar. Our food isn't just fast, you know – it's warp capable. Tribbleburger, anyone?

The spirit of Free Enterprise is alive and well in Sector 999. But what they really need out there isn't a fast-food emporium, but a scrap metal dealer.

other stuff

● **arcane** 1-12. Complete with Encounters. Offers? Anthony Allan 01423 565002

● PC freeware, send 3-5" formatted disk and SAE to Carol Feltham, PO Box 14976, Stirling FK9 4LQ

● Free tarot/numerology consultation by post. Hand written. Confidential. UK only. Numerology requires DOB. SSAE to Matt – Free Reading, 5 Moorcroft Close, Cheadle, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs ST10 1HT

Please place my free ad under the following heading

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- ☐ Clubs
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- ☐ Live action
- ☐ Play-By-Mail
- ☐ Fanzines
- ☐ Miniatures
- ☐ Messages
- ☐ Other stuff

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- Under 18s must have the permission of a parent or guardian before placing a reader ad in **arcane**.

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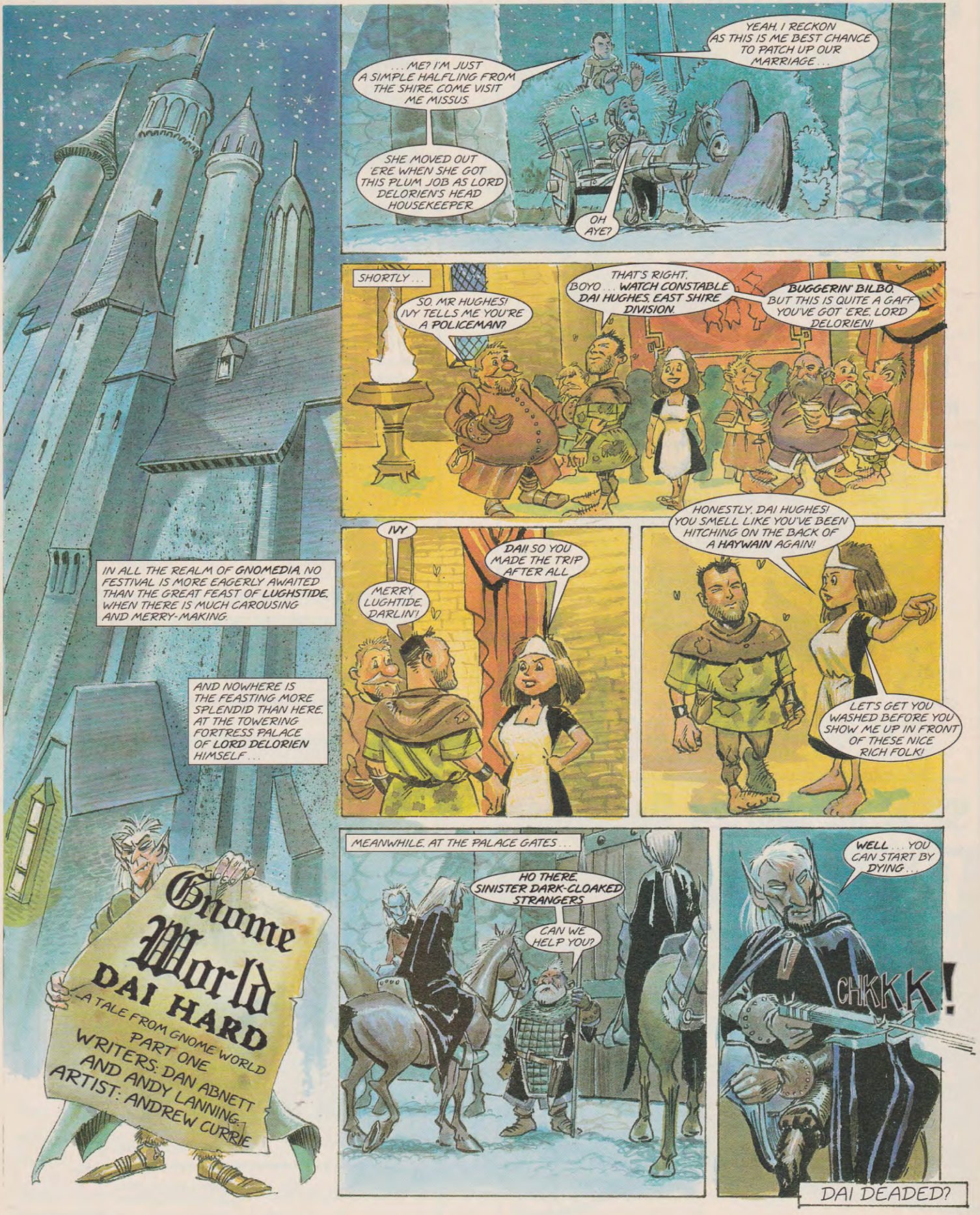
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Gnome World
DAI HARD
A TALE FROM GNOME WORLD
PART ONE
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING
ARTIST: ANDREW CURRIE
...ME? I'M JUST A SIMPLE HALFLING FROM THE SHIRE. COME VISIT ME MISSUS.
SHE MOVED OUT 'ERE WHEN SHE GOT THIS PLUM JOB AS LORD DELORIEN'S HEAD HOUSEKEEPER.
YEAH, I RECKON AS THIS IS ME BEST CHANCE TO PATCH UP OUR MARRIAGE...
OH AYE?
SHORTLY...
SO, MR HUGHES! IVY TELLS ME YOU'RE A POLICEMAN?
THAT'S RIGHT, 'BOYO ...WATCH CONSTABLE DAI HUGHES, EAST SHIRE DIVISION.
'BUGGERIN' BILBO, BUT THIS IS QUITE A GAFF YOU'VE GOT 'ERE, LORD DELORIEN!
IVY
DAI! SO YOU MADE THE TRIP AFTER ALL.
MERRY LUGHTIDE, DARLIN'!
HONESTLY, DAI HUGHES! YOU SMELL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN HITCHING ON THE BACK OF A HAYWAIN AGAIN!
LET'S GET YOU WASHED BEFORE YOU SHOW ME UP IN FRONT OF THESE NICE RICH FOLK!
MEANWHILE, AT THE PALACE GATES...
HO THERE, SIINISTER DARK-CLOAKED STRANGERS.
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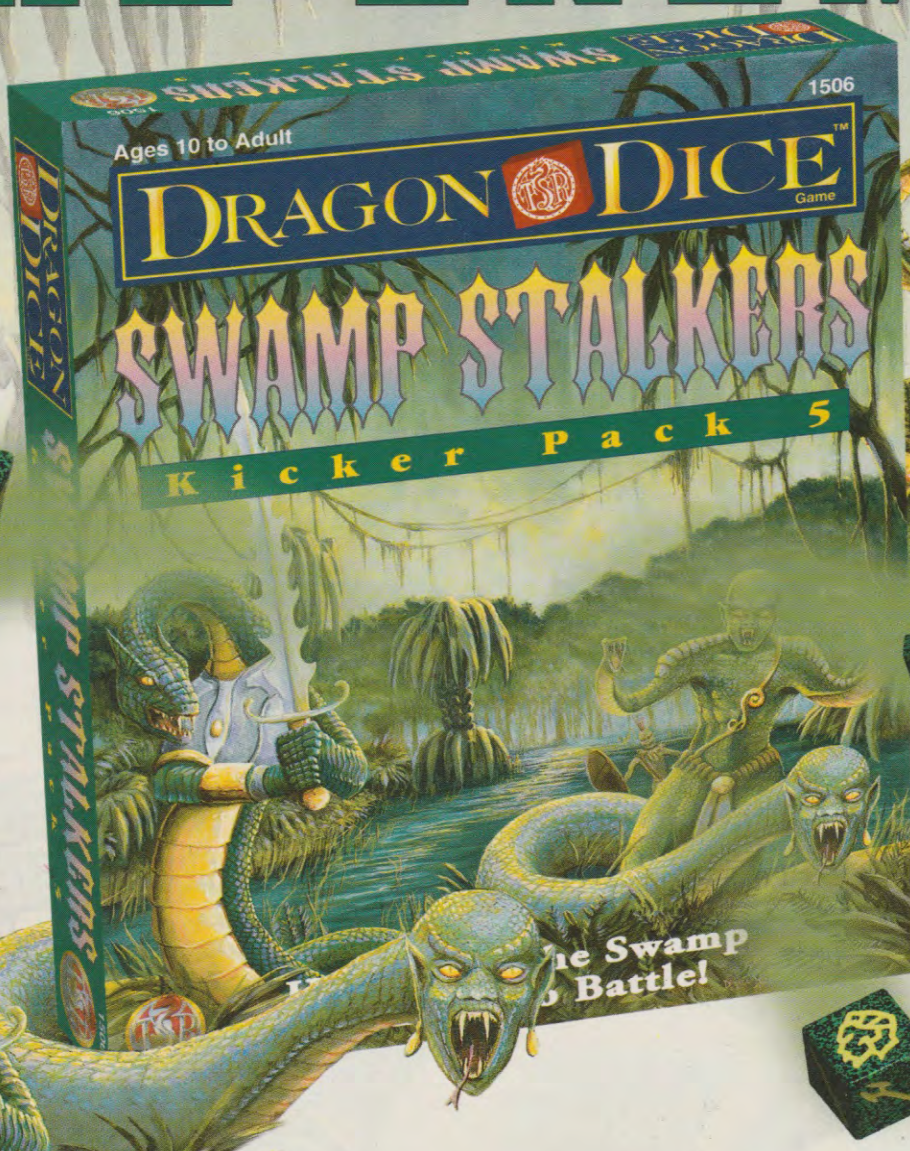

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